


Called to Teach



Edited by David Ewert

**PERSPECTIVES ON
MENNONITE LIFE AND THOUGHT**

NO. 3

Called to Teach

**A Symposium by the Faculty of the
Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary**

**Edited by
David Ewert
1980**

**Center of Mennonite Brethren Studies
Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
Fresno, California**

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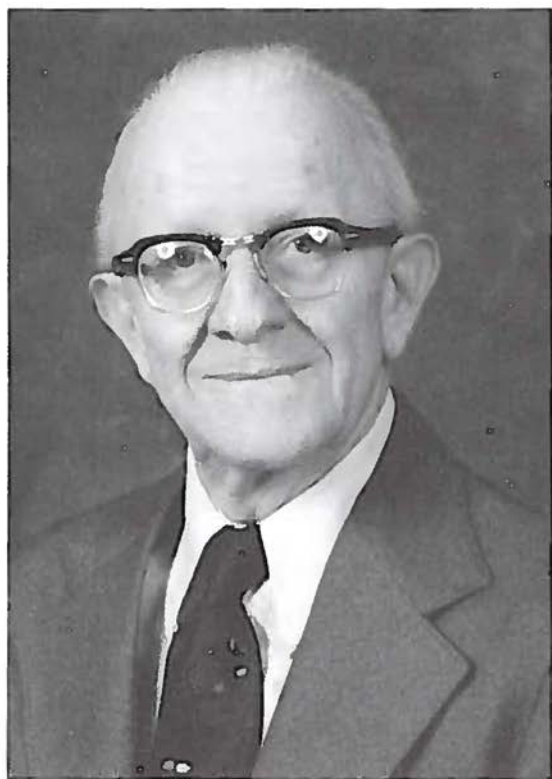
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PREFACE

The apostle Paul exhorted his younger colleague, Timothy, with the words: "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). The faculty of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary is deeply committed to fulfill this challenge, albeit in a different setting and a different age from that of Timothy.

We, too, call to mind with gratitude the names of many faithful witnesses who taught us the truth as it is in Jesus. Some of these were teachers in our own Mennonite Brethren schools, others who enriched our understanding of the Scriptures came from other persuasions. To all of these we feel indebted.

Recognizing that the church needs not only pastors and evangelists, but also teachers (Eph. 4:11), we as faculty look upon our calling as a gift of God's grace. Our calling is to equip those "who will be able to teach others." We do not take this vocation lightly, and feel responsible not only to God but also to our Brotherhood which supports us in this task.

Occasionally seminary teachers are asked, "What does the seminary teach?" If the question relates to some article in our Mennonite Brethren confession of faith, the answer is simple enough, for all faculty members subscribe to that confession. On issues that lie farther on the periphery of the Christian faith one would have to ask the individual teachers, for on such questions the faculty members may not always agree.

To give our Brotherhood a taste of the kind of things we teach, it was agreed that we should publish a volume of essays, written by seminary faculty members, under the motto: "Called to Teach."

Twelve faculty members have contributed one chapter each to this volume. The book is divided into four sections: Part one contains three chapters on the subject of "teachers" in the Bible; part two deals with the teaching

agencies within the church; part three singles out three important strands of Biblical teaching; part four focuses on that which is uniquely Mennonite Brethren in our faith and heritage, and on how the Seminary seeks to entrust this heritage to faithful students.

Whereas the editor has exercised general oversight in the creation of this volume, each faculty member had the freedom to develop his topic as he saw fit and in his own style. However, the editor wishes to acknowledge the valuable criticisms and suggestions of his colleagues as they read each other's chapters. Much thanks is due also to our seminary secretaries who typed these chapters and to Henry H. Dueck, Vice President for Administration, who saw the volume through the press.

It is with gratitude to God that we dedicate this book to His faithful servant, Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert, who was able by God's grace for a period of twenty five years to entrust to others at the seminary what he had learned.

David Ewert

D. EDMOND HIEBERT

Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert is the one faculty member whose ministry at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary has continued for 25 years, so that to mark a 25th anniversary year for the school is to mark an anniversary of teaching for Dr. Hiebert. It is appropriate to honor this scholar in conjunction with the publication of this volume. Moreover, we, his colleagues, take genuine pleasure in recognizing his contribution in theological training.

When the Seminary began in 1955, linked at that time to Pacific Bible Institute on Tuolumne Street (later to be Fresno Pacific College), Dr. Hiebert was one of five faculty. He had moved to California with Ruth, his wife and three children, Dean, Dorothy, and Alice, from Hillsboro, Kansas where he taught at Tabor College. At the Seminary he instructed in Greek and New Testament. He was honored at his retirement in 1975 with a celebrative banquet and with an issue of *DIRECTION*, a publication of Mennonite Brethren higher educational institutions. Since 1975 he has continued teaching as professor emeritus. This his 25th anniversary at the Seminary marks the completion of 38 years of ministry in the Mennonite Brethren Brotherhood.

Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert is a man in whose life the grace of God has come to be demonstrated particularly. Both faculty and students recognize him as a man of God. Dr. Hiebert's handicap of total deafness, a handicap which has crippled lesser men, has surfaced sterling qualities and has shown the sufficiency of the grace of God. His pleasant and Christ-like ways, his open and smiling countenance, testify to continued inner triumph. He is a man of prayer. As his former pastor I testify to his diligence in participating in small group prayer sessions. It is at once obvious to those who hear him pray that he is at home in God's audience chambers.

In Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert the Spirit-given grace of teaching has come to expression beautifully. He is a man "able to teach." He has taught Synoptic Gospels over the years with a particular enthusiasm; and former students, including this writer, recall how dialogue or parable portions

would come alive through impersonations. Though highly knowledgeable, Dr. Hiebert still prepares carefully for each class session. In almost uncanny ways he anticipates students' questions. He will not ever be charged with wasting the students' class time—he redeems every minute of the teaching hour. More important by far is his unquestioned devotion to the Bible as God's inspired and infallible Word.

Dr. Hiebert is a scholar as well as a teacher. He has distinguished himself through his writings. Most significant is the 3-volume *Introduction to the New Testament*. Many have expressed appreciation for those carefully articulated Bible book outlines. Commentaries such as those on Mark, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Thessalonians, James and I Peter (in process) along with such gems as *Working by Prayer* and *Personalities Around Paul* have made his diligent research available beyond the classroom. The fruit of his scholarship has overflowed into the life of his denomination. Not only has he contributed many an article to periodicals (more than 200 book reviews), but for 12 years he was editor and writer of the adult Sunday school lessons. His scholarly stature is evident through his participation in the preparation of the *New International Version of the Bible*. He has contributed 52 articles to the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

Dr. Hiebert has endeared himself to many. His words of encouragement, "More power to you," and his pleasantries have lightened the day for students, faculty and administrators. Alumni who return to the school frequently spend a special time with their former teacher. He has been generous with his gifts, his time and his library, for the Seminary is the recipient of 6,000 volumes from his library.

"Let us now praise famous men," said the writer of Ecclesiasticus.

With genuine affection we, his colleagues, join many others in expressing gratitude to Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert, a model among us. With thanksgiving to God, we tender deep appreciation to an outstanding man, God's gift to the Seminary and to the English-speaking evangelical world.

In behalf of the faculty, Elmer A. Martens, President

PART ONE

TEACHERS IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER I

WISDOM TEACHERS AND PRIESTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND NOW

Elmer Martens

To ask what the Old Testament has to say about teaching is to ask a big question, because the Old Testament in its entirety is Torah. Torah is a term which is sometimes translated "law" in the legal sense, but Jewish scholars rightly insist that it means "teaching". The word Torah comes from the verb *yara* which signifies "to throw" or "to point the way". The Torah, narrowly defined as Pentateuch or broadly defined as the entire Scripture offers a wide range of pointers on the subject of teaching.

The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into three parts: Pentateuch (Torah), Prophets, and the Writings. From each one may select a passage that deals with the subject of teaching. From the Pentateuch one might choose Deuteronomy 6:1-9; from the Writings, Proverbs 22:17-21 and from the Prophets, Malachi 2:1-9. Such a selection from the three parts of the Hebrew Bible would identify three groups as teachers: parents, sages and priests. These would represent three sociological settings, then as now: the home, the school, and the religious community.

In this essay, however, we limit ourselves to the passages of Scripture that deal with the school and the religious community, since the teaching by parents is dealt with elsewhere. The texts in Proverbs and Malachi will focus the formal task of teaching, first in the school, then in the religious community. We turn our attention first to the book of Proverbs where values are the content of educational guidelines.

*I. SAGES TEACHING IN THE SCHOOL:
PROVERBS 22:17-21*

"Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise;
Apply your heart to what I teach,
For it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart
And have all of them ready on your lips.
So that your trust may be in the Lord,
I teach you today, even you.
Have I not written thirty sayings for you
Sayings of counsel and knowledge,
Teaching you true and reliable words,
So that you can give sound answers
To him who sent you?" (Proverbs 22:17-21 NIV)

A. In Praise of Wisdom Literature

The opening line is memorable to me because of an autograph from public school days. On a blue page a school mate who did not take kindly to me had written, "Bow down thine ears, and hear the words of the wise" (Prov. 22:17 KJV).

Little did I dream that these words would have a particular fascination in later life when I learned that they are an introduction to a separate block of materials in the Proverbs which has strong similarities with the Egyptian wisdom of Amenemopet. Like the "thirty sayings" of Scripture, the Egyptian proverbs are divided into thirty "houses." The special collection of proverbs, sometimes called, "The Sayings of the Wise" (Prov. 22:17-24:34) hereafter "Sayings", include proverbs from an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh who lived 20 years before King Solomon. Whether Solomon was dependent on these Egyptian proverbs is still under discussion. Many scholars argue that the evidence for such dependency is clear.¹ Even if dependency on the Egyptian literature were fully demonstrated, the orientation of the introduction to the Sayings in Proverbs advances its own peculiar characteristic discernible in the motivation for heeding the saying of the wise man: "So that your trust may be in the Lord" (Prov. 22:18) Such a statement is not

making the request was instantly identified and a place was gladly provided. In the Upper Room Jesus approved his disciples' use of the term for himself, "Ye call me Teacher, and Lord" [Gr. "The Teacher and the Lord"] and you are right; for so I am" (John 13:13).

The records demonstrate that Jesus effectively ministered as a teacher and was widely acknowledged as such; but He was not officially accredited as a teacher by the Jewish authorities. He had never attended their rabbinical schools nor received their stamp of approval as an orthodox teacher.⁷ Nor did the religious leaders of the nation fail to challenge Jesus with this deficiency when they confronted him (John 2:18, Matt. 21:23-24; Mark 11:28; Luke 20:1-2). Yet upon hearing his discourse in the temple these hostile leaders could not fail to notice that Jesus taught with all the ear-marks of a trained scholar and they marvelled at this skill, which they could not account for (John 7:15).

During Jesus' initial ministry in Jerusalem at the first Passover of his public ministry, Nicodemus, a leading Jewish teacher, was deeply impressed with Christ's teaching and authenticating signs. In his approach to Jesus by night he generously granted that Jesus was "a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2 ASV). Himself an experienced rabbi, Nicodemus readily sensed that spiritual power in the ministry of Jesus. He instinctively recognized the operation of a supernatural commission which Jesus claimed for his teaching (John 7:16-18).

The practice of eulogizing the Jesus of history as "The Master Teacher" is fully justified.

II. THE EDUCATIONAL CRITERIA OF A MASTER TEACHER

By first century standards Jesus was indeed a teacher who excelled as a Master Teacher. But it may be asked if in the light of present educational standards he may still be extolled as the Master Teacher.

Leaders in the field of education today have given much thought to the identification of criteria for teacher compe-

tence.⁸ The difficulty of erecting adequate and valid criteria is well recognized. The proposed criteria will naturally vary with the setting, level, purposes, and other factors in the educational process to be evaluated. The proposed criteria must remain flexible due to the imponderable human factors involved, as well as the countless variant elements in the learning process. Yet it is clear that certain general criteria for teacher competence can be established. Such criteria for instructional excellence in education generally must relate to the teacher's personal characteristics and attitudes, his mastery of his subject, his relation to his students, his ability to direct the learning process, as well as his grasp of pertinent goals for his work. The same general criteria may appropriately be applied to the competency of the teacher in Christian education.

In 1932 Norman E. Richardson, a leader in Christian education, in his book *The Christ of the Class Room*, proposed "five characteristics of competency in teaching" and then evaluated the excellency of Jesus as a teacher in the light of those criteria.⁹ His criteria of the competent teacher were: (1) objectives clearly conceived and evaluated; (2) mastery of his subject matter; (3) devotion to his pupils; (4) skill in the techniques of teaching; and (5) personality as a teaching asset. While variants or supplementary considerations might be proposed, his criteria are adequate for a brief survey of the competency of Jesus as a teacher for our own times.

A. Controlling objectives. An effective teacher has clearly conceived goals which dominate and guide his work. He has clearly formulated long-range aims for his students. His ultimate aims provide a standard of measurement for progress already realized and aid in the determination of next steps necessary, the immediate aims, towards achievement of the ultimate goal.

The overarching passion in the life of Jesus Christ was the doing of God's will (Heb. 10:7; John 4:34; Matt. 26:39, 42, 44). He accepted God's will as beneficent for mankind and insisted that doing God's will was the true mark of membership in the family of God: "Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).

Mary Morrison remarks that Jesus tried to teach "the most difficult thing on earth—the Will of God, the Way of God, or, as he most often called it, the Kingdom of God."¹⁰ Richardson sees the work of Jesus as a teacher centering in a twofold objective:

With individuals in mind, he said, "I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). With organized society in mind, he proclaimed: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mark 1:15).¹¹

Jesus manifested a deep concern for individuals wherever He went. John's account of His dealings with Nicodemus the noted rabbi and Sanhedrin member (John 3:1-21) as well as the sinful Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:5-29) illustrates Jesus' unceasing concern to help the individual find life in God and aid him in overcoming the hindrances to the enjoyment of abundant life. Sinners found in him a forgiving Saviour and sympathetic Friend (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:36-50; John 8:3-11). The afflicted in body and spirit found in him a compassionate physician (Matt. 11:28-30), One ever ready to ease their burden and share his life with them. The young and the immature were objects of special concern to him (Mark 10:13-16; Matt. 18:1-6). His concern everywhere was to defeat the forces of sin and evil, to break the power of the demonic world over human lives, and to lead people to do the will of God in all areas of life. In His teaching He sought to communicate God's will to his hearers and to stimulate them to allow it to become operative in their lives.

The Kingdom of God was the central theme in the teaching of Jesus. He "saw the individual in a social and economic setting, He saw society made up of individuals, each one with his problems of achieving the highest self-realization as well as social usefulness."¹² He was opposed to evil both in its individual and its social aspects. He condemned injustice wherever confronted, warned against the dangers of materialism in its various manifestations, censured the blighting forces of formalism, grieved over the weaknesses and disorders of society which hindered the coming of the Kingdom of God. He rejoiced in the development of godly character in his followers and skillfully used

those materials and methods which would be serviceable in the accomplishment of his goals for them. He did not hesitate to censure and correct those actions and attitudes in his followers which hampered the development of his purpose for them.

B. Knowledge of his subject. It is a truism that a teacher cannot successfully teach others that which he does not himself understand. Many a teacher has known the embarrassment in his teaching of being pushed beyond the limits of his own knowledge. With one fundamental question Jesus exposed the inadequacy of the knowledge of the scribes and Pharisees, the self-professed authorities on the Jewish scriptures (Matt. 22:41-46), yet Jesus himself never experienced that embarrassment. The cleverest assaults of his wily opponents never succeeded in maneuvering him into a position where he had to confess that he did not know what the answer was (Matt. 22: 15, 29; Luke 20:7-8).

Those who heard the teaching of Jesus were repeatedly astonished at the depth of the religious knowledge which he displayed. His own townsmen, who thought they knew all about His background and training, exclaimed, "Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom?" (Matt. 13:54). The professional scholars in Jerusalem who regarded Jesus as an uneducated country up-start, upon hearing Him were forced to exclaim, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" (John 7:15). After having taught His disciples for three years, Jesus remarked to them, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now" (John 16:12). The limitation lay not in his possession of knowledge but rather in the limited capacity of the disciples to receive and understand.

Jesus revealed penetrating insights into the perplexing religious and doctrinal problems of his day. He understood the crucial importance of the new birth for entry into the Kingdom, a matter obscure to the learned Nicodemus (John 3:1-15). He skillfully untangled the conflicting views of the Jewish scholars concerning divorce (Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12). He provided a stunning solution to the catch-question of Jewish obligation to the rule of Rome as over against the rule of God (Matt. 22:21-22; Mark 12:17; Luke

20:25-26). He had a clear and convincing answer to the problem of the nature of the most important commandment (Mark 12: 28-34).

The common people who heard the teaching of Jesus were constantly impressed with the freshness and authority of his teaching. There was an appealing spontaneity and freedom in His teaching which lifted it above the routine, laboriously acquired knowledge of the scribes. His hearers could not escape the obvious contrast that he "was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:29). The scribes in their teaching appealed to an external authority. They supported their views with the sage observations that Rabbi Know-it had taught thus, that Doctor Dry Bones had successfully maintained the same interpretation, and that Rabbi Smell Fungus had long ago sanctioned this insight. Repeatedly Jesus prefaced His teaching with the words, "Verily, Verily I say unto you," to underline the ringing certainty and importance of that which He was communicating to His hearers. That which He taught arose out of the depths of his own inner being as the verbalization of divine truth.

The teachings of Jesus demonstrated His profound spiritual insights into the truths of the Old Testament Scriptures. Repeatedly He went beyond the prevailing rabbinical interpretations to lay bare their true spiritual import. His teachings also reveal wide observation and keen appreciation of the varied experiences and relationships of everyday life. He understood the practices and customs of the home, the community, the world of business and governmental activities around Him. He was a keen student of nature and was sensitive to the spiritual truths it proclaimed. Above all he knew God and his Word, lived in intimate fellowship with him, and freely quoted the Scriptures as the authoritative standard of truth. James S. Stewart notes that on the basis of this test of knowledge "Christ was the supreme teacher, because he lived supremely what he taught and lived it entirely nonprofessionally and naturally."¹³

C. *Devotion to his pupils.* Modern education insists that the effective teacher must have an understanding of

and personal concern for the welfare of his students. He is concerned to use and adapt his teaching material to promote the growth and maturity of his pupils. It is the common testimony that those teachers who helped and inspired us most to achieve were those who made us feel that they were personally concerned about us and willing to give of themselves to further our growth and achievements.

As a teacher Jesus manifested a remarkable understanding of human nature (John 2:25) and had a penetrating insight into the real needs of those with whom He dealt (John 3:3; 4:10-16). He had the deep concern of a true shepherd for His sheep (John 10:7-18) and was willing to give of Himself to the point of death in order to procure their spiritual deliverance. He saw sin and Satan as the greatest enemies of those He sought to win and unselfishly devoted his life to procure true and abundant life for them. His deep love for and intimacy with his disciples was unsurpassed.

As the Master Teacher Jesus was no recluse, no "holier-than-thou" rabbi whom people could only revere from a distance; He was readily available to all classes of people, was repeatedly thronged by the crowds so that there was no time for him even to eat (Mark 3:20; 6:31). He ministered to both young and old, the rich and the poor, the leaders as well as the common people who thronged around him. He skillfully ministered to large groups, readily adapting his message and methods to the circumstances (Matt. 13:10-14; Mark 4:33-34). With equal willingness he also ministered to small groups or to individuals. It is remarkable how some of his greatest teachings were delivered to an audience of one. Everywhere his concern was to bring spiritual life to those to whom he ministered.

D. Skill in the techniques of teaching. The effective teacher knows the nature of the learning process and how to use his subject matter to promote learning on the part of those taught. The skillful teacher knows how to use methods of teaching that will make his subject vital to his students. The teacher who is so enamored with a certain method of teaching that he fails to consider whether or not his pupils are learning is stupid. The teacher who is so preoc-

cupied with his subject matter that he is oblivious to the capacities and needs of his pupils will likewise fail to make the truth taught to be vital in the lives of the students. The effective teacher will endeavor to select those techniques and materials that will best promote the learning process and will use his material to foster a more abundant life in his students and to stimulate their personal growth.

The Gospels demonstrate that Jesus used a wide variety of teaching methods in his teaching. The varied techniques used were skillfully adapted to the situation confronted. The fact that the common people flocked to him and heard him gladly proves that there was no boring artificiality in his teaching. He presented his message in an interesting and appealing fashion.

Jesus used the method of oral instruction. He did not use the written page or printed quarterlies to disseminate his message. The only time the Gospels picture Jesus as writing he wrote in the sand (John 8:6). "All his precious, golden words, all his final pronouncements of faith and morals, all his 'oracles of God' were trusted to the memories" of those who heard Him.¹⁴

The oral method of instruction was likewise the method of the rabbis of that day. It was the pride of the Jewish rabbi to pass on unaltered to his pupils the teaching he had heard from his teacher. The ideal rabbinical student was like a well-plastered cistern who allowed nothing of what he had received to be lost. This rabbinical accumulation of teaching was known as the "Tradition of the Elders." It consisted of "a vast body of learned disquisition, commentary and rule, in which the precepts of the Law were interpreted and applied to daily ritual and life."¹⁵ These "Traditions of the Elders" (Matt. 15:2) were not committed to writing until late in the second century.

Behind all the religious teaching of the rabbis lay, of course, the written Word, the Old Testament Scriptures. They were the authoritative source for the faith of the Jewish people. But copies of these Scriptures, which had all to be reproduced by hand, were costly and comparatively rare. To a large extent the common people depended upon the public reading of those Scriptures in the synagogues and the in-

struction of the schools for their knowledge of them. This extensive dependence upon the hearing of the law trained the hearers in the habit of accuracy in remembering what they heard.¹⁶ Therefore the ability to recall verbatim what had been heard was treasured.

Jesus used the oral method of teaching with consummate skill. It was ideal for his life-centered purpose and promoted life-situation teaching. There is no intimation in the Gospels that the teaching of Jesus was ever merely "book-centered." We are never informed that Jesus ever instructed the Twelve to study Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53 for their next lesson and be prepared for an examination on it. Jesus Himself had a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and repeatedly quoted them as authoritative. He could also assume that the Twelve, as well as the common people, had a general acquaintance with those Scriptures. It was part of their training in school and synagogue. But it was ever the purpose of the Master Teacher to make that knowledge vital and operative in their faith and daily life. Neither did Jesus write out a detailed, systematic presentation of the message which He wanted his disciples to master and to transmit to others. While the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25) establish that Jesus did give his disciples systematic instruction at considerable length, his teaching was more often occasion-inspired and aimed at their spiritual needs and individual growth. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26) his teaching has been preserved for us in the Four Gospels.

Jesus skillfully cast his teaching into a variety of literary forms.¹⁷ Therein his artistry as a teacher stands clearly revealed.

An outstanding feature of his teaching was his frequent use of the *parable*. These parables constitute an important and cherished portion of our Four Gospels. They aptly served to secure interest, stimulate thought, illustrate the truth to those spiritually qualified, while concealing it from the hostile and unworthy. They also served to lodge the intended truth in the minds of the unbelieving by means of an appealing story which would yield its meaning to them whenever their hostility toward Christ might change.

The great variety of these parables reveals the master mind behind them. "They vary greatly in length, some being germ parables and others long ones. They cover almost every phase of life, including inanimate things, such as soil, clothes, and food; various kinds of plants, birds and animals; and human beings in various relations."¹⁸ They bear eloquent testimony to the intellectual alertness of Jesus as a teacher and his ability to draw spiritual lessons from all areas of life.

Jesus did not invent the use of the parable. There are occasional parables in the Old Testament, and the Jewish rabbis made use of them in teaching, but a cursory comparison establishes that Jesus brought the use of the parables as a means of teaching to its perfection. It is significant that the use of the parable is absent from the preaching of the apostles in Acts, nor do parables appear in any of the epistles.

Jesus also used maxims, proverbs, epigrams, and paradoxes in his teaching; his use of personification, hyperbole, and pithy utterances, such as the Beatitudes, made his teaching vivid and quotable. He also used the news of current events (Luke 13:1-5), or interruptions in his teaching (Luke 12:13), to inculcate important truths. His oral instruction is characterized by freshness, vividness, concreteness, and quotability.

Modern educational trends tend to discount the use of the *lecture*, but it did have an important place in the ministry of Jesus. Matthew records no less than five lengthy discourses from the lips of Jesus in his Gospel (chs. 5-7; 10; 13; 23; 24-25). The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) was a didactic discourse admirably serving to give his hearers a well-rounded presentation of the nature and demands of the Kingdom of Heaven. It offered a clear and provoking portrayal of the Kingdom and created a mighty impact on the minds and emotions of the hearers.

Jesus made skillful use of the *question and answer* method. He used questions not only to elicit information, but also to stimulate and direct thought. He often made use of a counter-question in order to clarify the situation, expose the hostile motives of the questioners, or point the questioner to the proper answer to his own question.

Jesus also made use of the *discussion* method which is popular in adult circles today and has been defined as "the process of arriving at an interpenetrated conclusion through group thinking."¹⁹ But under his direction it was never merely the pooling of collective ignorance on a subject or the attainment of a limited or biased consensus about a problem. His use of this method seems largely to have been with individuals or small groups, and the discussions were on the level of conversational teaching. An illustration is his encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4). In dealing with biblical truth his method was not just to give an exegetical clarification of the Old Testament teaching but to make a living application of that truth to the particular life-situation confronted.

Jesus also used the elements of the modern *project method* of teaching. He took his disciples with him, giving them valuable training through personal observation. He also gave them specific problems to work out, such as where to find bread to feed the hungry crowd (John 6:5; Mark 6:35-39). He sent them out two by two on practice teaching missions and upon their return discussed their experiences with them (Mark 6:7-13; Matt. 10:1-11:1; Luke 10:1-20).

Our Lord did not have available the use of present-day audiovisual materials and props, but it is obvious that He would have felt perfectly at ease with such techniques, had they been available to Him.

E. *A dynamic personality.* Modern education recognizes the central importance of the personality of the teacher for effective education. And nowhere is the teacher's personality of greater importance than in religious education. Here it is essential that the teacher himself be a growing example of what he wants his students to become. Christian education has been defined as the dissemination of divine truth through God-touched personality. As we think of our Christian teachers of yester-years, most will agree that they inspired us by what they taught, more often by what they did for us, but most of all by the kind of people they were.

Measured by this criterion, Jesus Christ by common consent ranks as the Peerless Teacher. Squires insists, "The

power of Jesus as a teacher must be attributed first of all to his personality."²⁰

Even those who deny the biblical teaching concerning his nature as God incarnate (John 1:14), readily acknowledge the striking greatness of his personality. But those who were his most intimate associates and knew him best became unshakably convinced that in him deity was manifest in human form. As the Incarnate Word of God he could indeed say to his disciples, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). It was this unique inner consciousness that he was one with the Father (John 10:30) that marked him as unique among men. His first disciples were profoundly impressed with his unique character (John 1:29-51), and after three years of the most intimate associations with him, the Twelve joined Peter in confessing, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

While Jesus was frequently addressed as "Teacher," the Gospels make it clear that more frequently he was addressed as "Lord" (*kurie*).²¹ But this title was never used by those who were his avowed enemies. It was in fact Jesus' claim to deity that infuriated the Jewish leaders and fanned their hatred against him (John 8:38-58; 10:22-39; Matt. 26:63-67; John 19:7; Matt. 27:41-44). During Passion Week Jesus tried to show the Jewish leaders that it was their very refusal to accept his true nature as the incarnate Lord that blinded them to a true understanding concerning the biblical teaching about the Messiah (Matt. 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44).

The title "Lord" as used in addressing Jesus admittedly carried varied shades of significance. Occasionally it was used simply as a title of personal respect, equivalent to our English "Sir" (cf. John 4:11). Commonly it conveyed a distinct acknowledgement of the dignity and spiritual authority of the one so addressed. And in the words of Thomas, after the resurrection, when he cried out, "My Lord and My God" (John 20:29), it carries the highest expression of worship and adoration of the glorified Jesus as verily God. This testimony forms the deliberate climax to John's picture of Jesus Christ in the Fourth Gospel.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that as measured by modern standards of teacher excellence Jesus Christ is still justly acclaimed as the Master Teacher. But the titles applied to him in the Gospels, consistent with the entire biblical portrait of him, proclaim the message that he was more than just a great human teacher; he was indeed the incarnate Word of God to mankind. The address "Teacher" gives open recognition to his prominent activity during his earthly ministry and records his recognized effectiveness as a teacher. The address, however, while prominent in the Gospels, is never used in relation to him in the rest of the New Testament. The more frequently used appellation, "Lord," gives more distinct recognition to his personal greatness. The term "Teacher" is appropriately applied to the man Jesus, the incarnate Messiah, and bears witness to his mastery in the art of teaching; He was indeed the Master Teacher in communicating the message of God to men. But after his resurrection and glorification the title is never applied to him again and he is acclaimed as uniquely "the Lord," the Master to whom his followers yield their adoration and obedience.

Jesus Himself called attention to this double relation to his disciples in the upper room the night before his crucifixion. "You call me Teacher, and Lord (Gr. 'the' Teacher and 'the' Lord); and you are right; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example" (John 13:13-15a). As his disciples, they have followed him as their Teacher and Lord. As "The Teacher" he has brought God's revelation to them; as "The Lord" he is himself their sovereign leader. They have committed themselves not merely to his teaching; as his disciples they have committed themselves to him. But now that his ministry here on earth is completed and is about to be terminated in his supreme self-sacrifice, he reverses the order of the terms. He is now their Lord and Teacher. In the years to come they will rightly recognize him as their Master whose matchless teachings they have received and must obey. "Their message was not just the words of Jesus, although they did 'receive' and thus

'delivered' his words; but their message consisted of the person of their teacher as well."²²

As teachers at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Master Teacher and desire to further his work in our teaching ministry under empowerment of the Holy Spirit. But we also hail him as our Saviour and Lord and affirm that "in the intimacy of his relationship to the souls of believers he is something more than can be contained or suggested by even that wonderful name, 'Teacher come from God'."²³

NOTES

- 1 Anthony C. Deane, *Rabboni, a Study of Jesus Christ the Teacher*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, (n.d.), p. 27.
- 2 J.M. Price, *Jesus the Teacher*. Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, (1946), pp. 6-7.
- 3 Clarence H. Benson, *A Popular History of Christian Education*. Chicago: Moody Press, (1943), p. 31.
- 4 Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, (1978), p. 2.
- 5 John A. Marquis, *Learning to Teach from the Master Teacher*. The Westminster Press, (1913), p. 6.
- 6 James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, (1952), p. 245.
- 7 For a description of the normal process by which a man became an accepted rabbi see Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, translated by F.H. and C.H. Cave, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, (1969), pp. 233-45.
- 8 David G. Ryans, *Characteristics of Teachers, Their Description, Comparison, and Appraisal, A Research Study*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1960; Robert B. Howsam, *Who's A Good Teacher?* Burlingame, California: California Teachers Association, 1960; The Commission on Teacher Education, *Six Areas of Teacher Competence*. Burlingame, California: California Teachers Association, 1964; Dale L. Bolton, *Selection and Evaluation of Teachers*, Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1973.
- 9 Norman E. Richardson, *The Christ of the Class Room*. New York: The Macmillan Co., (1932), pp. 3, 21-23, and *passim*.
- 10 Mary C. Morrison, *Jesus: Man and Master*. Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., (1968), p. 35.

- 11 Richardson, *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 12 Richardson, *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 13 James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*. New York: Abingdon Press, (n.d.), p. 70.
- 14 Stewart, *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 15 E. Griffith-Jones, *The Master and His Method*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, (1914), p. 48. On the "tradition of the Elders" see further, W. White, Jr., "Tradition of the Elders," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Merrill C. Tenney, general editor, Vol. V, (1975), pp. 793-95.
- 16 This is in sharp contrast to modern methods of "source memory" where the student is more concerned with remembering the sources of information than the ability accurately to reproduce what was said by the teacher.
- 17 For an interesting study of the various literary techniques in the teaching of Jesus see Stein, *Ibid.*, pp. 7-59.
- 18 J.M. Price, James H. Chapman, A.E. Tibbs, L.L. Carpenter, *A Survey of Religious Education*. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, (1940), p. 39.
- 19 Price, *Jesus the Teacher*, p. 113.
- 20 Walter Albion Squires, *The Pedagogy of Jesus in the Twilight of Today*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, (1927), p. 45.
- 21 In the Gospels Jesus is addressed as "Lord" some sixty-five times. The title is applied to Him hundreds of times in the entire New Testament.
- 22 Stein, *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 23 Squires, *Ibid.*, p. xv.

CHAPTER III

TEACHERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

John E. Toews

The lists of ministries or gifts in the New Testament reveal the existence of two kinds of teachers in the early church, prophets, and teachers. The prophets stand in second place in the lists in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 and in the first place in Romans 12. The teacher is in third place in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, in second place in Romans 12, and first in the Pastorals (I Timothy 5:17).¹

The purpose of this article is to examine the nature of these teaching ministries in the early church and to inquire about their significance for the contemporary church. More attention will be devoted to the prophet as teacher because this form of teaching ministry has received less consideration in the church.

I. THE PROPHET AS TEACHER

Antecedents to the Christian Prophet

The prophetic ministry in the early church is rooted in a long tradition of prophecy in Ancient Israel. Beginning with Moses God revealed his will to his people through divinely chosen individuals. To begin with these individuals seem to have functioned as members and/or leaders of prophetic schools, e.g., Samuel and Elijah. From the time of Amos on we hear nothing about such prophetic fellowships. Instead we read of single prophetic figures and their disciple following, e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah.²

For many centuries it was assumed that the prophetic movement died out in Judaism around 400 B.C. The manu-

script finds of the last 50 years, however, have shown that the prophetic movement continued in Judaism during this period and experienced a rather dramatic renewal at Qumran.³

The prophetic movement of the inter-testamental period modified the more classical forms of prophecy at several points that are significant for understanding the role of prophecy in the early church. First of all, prophecy is redefined to include the exposition of earlier scriptures, e.g., Habakkuk or Isaiah. Secondly, prophecy is increasingly linked with wisdom. For example, wisdom is said to reside in the "prophet" Moses (Wis. Sol. 7:28; 11:1), and at Qumran Daniel the wise man is called a prophet (4QFlor. 2:3). These developments are especially evident in the apocalyptic literature. The apocalyptic seer marries prophetic vision with the wise discernment of its meaning.

The convergence of prophecy and wisdom occurs in part, at least, because both are increasingly identified with Israel's scriptures. Therefore, prophecy comes to mean not only inspired vision and word, but also inspired exposition and application of earlier prophetic words. Thus the wise teachers of Qumran expound the Scriptures, and the "prophet" becomes the model expositor of scripture in Rabbinic Judaism.

This "prophetic-wise man" figure of inter-testamental Judaism is probably the most direct antecedent of the Christian prophets, and of Jesus as well.

Jesus is identified as a prophet in the gospels. His prophetic activity includes synagogue teaching and scripture exposition (Lk. 4:24). The latter is characterized by "wisdom" and "authority" (Mk. 1:21f.; 6:2).

The Prophets in Acts

In Acts prophecy is one of the Holy Spirit's eschatological gifts of power that is available for all Christians. Thus, the Pentecost experience of speaking in tongues is identified as prophecy, and as a fulfillment of Joel's promise regarding the renewal of the prophetic gift (2:4, 11, 17ff.). But, more frequently prophecy is associated with certain leading men who exercise the gift as a ministry in the church. Within this more limited circle of prophets is a Jerusalem group in-

cluding Agabus which visits Antioch (11:27f.; 21:10), an Antioch group including Barnabas and Paul (13:1), and Judas Barsabbas and Silas who accompany the Jerusalem Decree to Antioch (15:22, 32). While Peter is not called a prophet he does all the things a prophet does in Acts, and so probably ought to be numbered as one of them.

The specific activities associated with the prophets in Acts are the following: 1) the prediction of future events (11:28; 20:23, 25; 27:22); 2) the declaration of divine judgment (13:11; 28:25-28); 3) the use of symbolic actions (21:11); 4) the experience of visions and dreams and the proclamation of the contents revealed (10:10; cf. also 9:10; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17ff.; 27:23); 6) the exposition of the Scriptures (13:5ff.; 14:22; 15:32).

The main purpose of these varied prophetic activities is exhortation or encouragement, *parakeleo/paraklesis*. The ministry of Judas Barsabbas and Silas in 15:32 is defined by the phrase, "exhort the brethren with many words and strengthen them." This verbal exhortation is set in parallel with the written "exhortation" of the Jerusalem Decree (15:27). The activity of Paul and Barnabas, is described in terms of exhortation in 14:22. The contents of the exhortation is outlined as "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God." The identification in Acts of exhortation as the focal ministry of the prophet corresponds with Paul's statements in I Corinthians 14. Exhortation seems to be the principle way in which the prophets exercised their ministry. This definition of the prophetic ministry points to teaching and counseling as the role of the prophets.

The interpretation of Scripture was a key element in this teaching ministry of the prophets. It is an important feature in the mission of the prophets Paul and Barnabas, as well as Paul and Silas, Peter and other Christian leaders (Acts 2:14-36; 4:8-12; 6:9-11; 8:30-35; 9:20-22; 13:5, 16-41, etc.). E. Ellis suggests we have an example of this prophetic interpretation of scripture in 13:16-41. Paul, the prophet "set aside" for mission in 13:1-2, interprets the Jewish Scripture in response to a request for a "word of exhorta-

tion."⁴ It is significant that Paul here is also a teacher and apostle.

Apparently there was no sharp distinction between apostle, prophet and teacher in the early church with respect to the interpretation of Scripture. Paul and Barnabas are called all three. The triad of I Corinthians 12 can be clustered around the same persons in Acts. If that is the case, what distinguished one ministry from another? That is difficult to determine in Acts because Luke's language is fluid.

Some have suggested the prophet spoke on the basis of revelation, while the teacher transmitted and expounded the tradition and inculcated the fundamentals of the faith.⁵ While this distinction is made by Paul, Acts gives no evidence for it. Furthermore, it does not take seriously enough the teaching role of the prophet in Acts. Acts made no clear differentiation between the teaching of the prophet and the teacher. Both expound the Scriptures and the sayings of Jesus.

Similarly, the role of prophet and apostle overlapped. Ellis suggests the two ministries represent two concentric circles, in which the prophet's activity is somewhat smaller than the apostle's.⁶

In Acts then the prophet is a minister of God who exhorts and expounds the Scriptures in a manner similar to the ministry of the apostle and teacher.

The Prophet in the Pauline Churches

The Importance of the Prophetic Ministry. Prophets were important ministers in the Pauline churches. They are mentioned in association with apostles as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20), and they also follow the apostles in the "gift lists" (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).

Prophecy is mentioned in the "gift lists" because it is one of the spiritual gifts, (*chrismata*). That means, (1) prophecy is a gift of grace exercised in the name of Jesus (I Cor. 12:3); (2) prophecy is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's activity in continuity with the prophets of Israel and yet also in fulfillment of the prophetic promises to Israel (Eph. 4:7f.); (3) prophecy is an eschatological gift of the new age that is

found only in the church (Eph. 4:8f.); (4) prophecy occurs in the context of the gathered church (I Cor. 14).

The gift of prophecy is to be preferred above all other gifts (I Cor. 14:1). That does mean, however, the gift is to be sought by individual believers, as I Corinthians 14:1 and 39 are often translated and interpreted. W.C. van Unnik suggests the phrase "earnestly desire" ought more correctly to be rendered "practice zealously the spiritual gifts, especially in order that you may prophecy."⁷ The point is that the gifts of the Spirit are not to be sought, but rather to be exercised because they are present already in the church as the community of the Spirit.

The importance of the prophetic ministry is evident also by its duration beyond the Pauline period. This ministry did not die out with the Apostle Paul or with the apostolic age. The *Didache*, an early second century writing, describes prophetic ministers in the churches (ch. 13). The Gospel of Thomas (Logion 42) and the Shepherd of Hermas (Mandate 11), both mid-second century, refer to prophetic ministries in their churches. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue* 82:1), also mid-second century, says that "the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time." Irenaeus, late second century, talks about brothers in the church who have prophetic gifts (*Against Heresies*, II, 32, 2 and V, 6, 1). A vigorous opponent of Christianity, Celsus, knows of Christian prophets in the churches in the early third century (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII, 9).

In spite of the importance of the prophetic ministry and its lengthy history in the early church, we have no literary records from this movement. Prophecy was a ministry of the spoken word, not the written word. I Corinthians 14 is the only description of the nature of this ministry in the New Testament. The 11th Mandate of the Shepherd of Hermas offers the only other picture of this ministry in the extant literature of early Christianity.⁸

The Context of the Prophetic Ministry. Prophecy occurs in the context of the gathered church. In I Corinthians 14 Paul describes the context twice with the word *sunerchesthai*, "to come together." When the church comes together, when the body of Christ is gathered, then the pro-

phet arises and ministers. The church is the presupposition and the context for the exercise of the spiritual gifts. The gifts are given to the church to be exercised by its members for the welfare and growth of the whole body.

Prophecy occurs in the Pauline churches both as the occasional utterance of various members and as the continuing ministry of a relatively few leaders within it. All believers, men and women, may exercise the gift, but only a few are prophets. (I Cor. 11 and 14). The latter apparently are those who are recognized "to have prophecy" (I Cor. 13:2). To begin with such leaders conducted their ministry primarily in one local church (I Cor. 13:2; 14:37; cf. with Acts 13:1; 15:22, 32; 21:9). Later, some of the prophets began to travel through the churches of a region (Acts 11:27; 15:22, 32; Didache 11:3ff.). But even then the prophetic ministry remained a congregational phenomenon. Its functions only when the church is assembled.⁹

The Purpose of Prophecy. The purpose of the prophetic ministry in I Corinthians 14 is edification, *oikodome* (vv. 3, 4, 26, 31). Edification means to build up another person, not only as an individual, but as a member of the church. Negatively, it involves the rejection of self-sufficient religious individualism which focuses attention on private spiritual phenomenon, e.g., speaking in tongues here.¹⁰

The meaning of edification is further defined by the words "exhort" (*paraklesis*) and "comfort" (*paramuthia*). These words are subordinate terms which define the nature and mode of edification. Together these words provide a functional definition of prophecy. The prophet edifies the church, he builds up the church by means of exhortation and comfort.

It is difficult to draw a sharp distinction between the meanings of "exhort" and "comfort" in Paul. When used together they are characterized by admonition and comfort.¹¹

How does the prophet edify by means of exhortation and comfort? He teaches. The manner of the prophet's ministry resembles what we would call exhortatory or pastoral preaching/teaching. The prophet of the early church is related to the prophets of Israel and the inter-

testamental period. He upbuilds by warning, instructing and correcting the church. The prophet teaches what the Christian way requires of the church and those who belong to the church.

The educational or teaching nature of the prophet's ministry of edification is underlined further in I Corinthians 14:19 and 31. In v. 19 Paul contrasts the unintelligibility of speaking in tongues and the comprehensibility of "instruction." Since the point of the whole context concerns the superiority of prophecy over tongues, the "instruction" here must refer to prophetic speech. The aim of the prophetic speech is instruction. The rare verb Paul uses here for "instruct," *katecho*, is used normally to describe teaching in the content of the faith.¹² In v. 31 Paul says the outcome of prophecy is learning and edification. To be edified by the prophetic gift is to be taught something and to learn what is taught. The prophet edifies by teaching, and the church is edified by learning.

E. Ellis provides further evidence of the teaching dimension of the prophetic ministry. He has made the case that "the Lord says" formula quotations of the Old Testament represent prophetic teachings. (e.g., II Cor. 6:14-18), as do the "faithful sayings" of the Pastoral Letters (e.g., I Tim. 1:15). The former contain significant textual variations from all known Old Testament text forms, and commentary-elaboration-application of the cited passage. The authoritativeness of "the Lord says" as well as the exposition of Scripture fit the prophet-wise man understanding of prophecy that developed during the inter-testamental period. Old Testament expositions like that found in I Corinthians 2:6-16, which appears to be the work of pneumatics and which follow well-known patterns in Judaism, probably also represent the work of prophets.¹³

The educational nature of the prophet's role blurs the line between prophecy and teaching in Paul, just as in Acts. Both are church centered ministries. Prophets and teachers address primarily the church, not the world. The prophet's word of teaching, however, has a less fixed content than the teacher's. The teacher transmits and expounds the tradition of Scripture and the Gospel. He may do this at any time. The prophet may do some of the same, but he can only

speak when the Spirit inspires and commissions him. The inspiration of the Spirit is a critical, distinguishing mark of the prophet.

Thus the prophet may teach as the teacher does, or exhort as the brethren exhort (I Thess. 4:18; 5:11; II Cor. 13:11). He is not differentiated by a unique content or area of ministry, but by the manner of his ministry. He is concerned with the totality of the church's life, but he speaks only when moved by the Spirit to speak. That is why his teaching can be called a revelation, *apokolupsis*. In I Corinthians 14:26 "revelation" replaces "prophecy" alongside of "teaching," *didache*. Both before and after Paul has been speaking of prophets. The use of "revelation" instead of "prophecy" suggests Paul wants to stress the nature of prophecy as revelation in contrast to teaching. This, of course, does not exclude teaching as a ministry of the Spirit, but rather emphasizes that the content of prophecy comes through revelation rather than tradition as in teaching.¹⁴

The revelatory nature of the prophetic word, however, must not lead to any confusion with "tongues". The "revelation" of prophecy and the "knowledge" of teaching have a rational and understandable content. They belong to the domain of the mind (*nous*). "Tongues," by contrast, belong to the realm of the ecstatic and can enter the sphere of the mind only through interpretation, e.g., translation into rational categories.

The Prophetic Ministry to Unbelievers. While the prophet's ministry is church centered, it does impact unbelievers who come to church (I Cor. 14:24-25). The prophet may be an evangelist, but only if the unbeliever is present in the gathered church. The effects of the prophetic word on the non-Christian are powerful. He is convicted of sin or unfaith. Secondly, he is judged, he is called to eschatological account in anticipation of the final judgment. And, finally, the secrets of his inner self are exposed. In short, prophecy makes the unbeliever aware that he lives under the power of sin and calls him to repentance. The point is clear, the prophetic word is a powerful one. It not only upbuilds the church, but it also convicts the sinner.

The Regulation of the Prophet's Ministry. Precisely because the prophetic word is a powerful one that is based

on inspiration, the prophetic gift is subject to abuse. Therefore, it must be carefully regulated and tested. Three regulations are outlined in I Corinthians 13-14. First of all, the prophet must prophesy out of love and in love, or he is nonexistent as a person and as a prophet, *outhen eimi* (13:2). Secondly, the prophetic ministry must edify the church (14:3-4). Thirdly, the prophetic ministry must be an orderly one (14:29-32). No more than two or three prophets shall speak in any given gathering of the church, and then one by one rather than simultaneously. If one prophet is speaking and a revelation is made to another, the speaker must stop and step aside for the other. This brief statement suggests a situation where a prophet adds comments of his own following the delivery of a prophetic word. Such teaching must yield to the prophetic word of a fellow-prophet. The underlying principle is stated in v. 32, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." The present tense of the verb to be subject or subordinate, *hypotasso*, is important. The prophetic inspiration is continuously subject to the prophet's will and control. When a prophet decides to stop speaking, the prophetic Spirit complies. The rule that the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet became a normative criterion in differentiating true prophesy from false in the early Christian church. The lack of prophetic control became one of the significant bases for discerning Montanism, a second century movement of the Spirit and prophecy, as a false prophetic movement.¹⁵

The Testing of the Prophetic Inspiration. The prophet does not judge the validity of his own message. Rather, he is subject to a testing process that involves various levels of church discernment. At one level the prophetic words must be congruent with the message and teachings of the apostles, in this case the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 14:37-38). At another level the prophetic word must be tested by the other prophets in the church (I Cor. 14:29). Finally, in I Thessalonians 5:20-21 Paul commands the whole church to test the prophetic word. Only after a prophet's word has been tested in this process is it to be received as the word of God. This discernment process distinguishes the prophetic inspiration from the prophet's own impulses, and differentiates true prophecy from false.

The ability to discern between true and false assumes some truth criteria. The New Testament describes two such criteria to be used in the testing process. First, the prophetic word must be in agreement with the central affirmations of the church. Paul states in I Corinthians 12:3 that the confession "Jesus is Lord" is central to any verbal ministry of the Spirit. Only that prophecy is legitimate which acknowledges that Jesus is risen and exalted. In Romans 12:6 Paul asserts that the prophetic gift must be exercised in right relationship to the faith. The genitive, "of the faith," here is probably an objective genitive defining the content of the faith.¹⁶ The writer of I John adds an additional theological benchmark, the confession that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and is of God (4:1-3). Secondly, the prophetic word must build up the church. The edification of the believing community is a frequent test of prophecy (I Cor. 14:4, 31; cf. also I Jn. 3:11-18; 4:7-21).

It is significant that these criteria are dynamic in nature. They are not rules or regulations that can be checked off by one or two leaders in the church. Rather, they are guidelines and principles which require a continuous discernment process in the life of the church. The effectiveness of the prophetic ministry is tied to such an ongoing testing process. The vitality of both, the prophetic ministry and the testing process, is a sign of the vitality of the church.

This concern for testing prophetic inspiration continued in the early church after the time of the apostles. In *Didache* (ca. 110 A.D.) the writer outlines three criteria for discerning the true from the false prophet. First, does the prophet teach what Jesus taught? Is there theological congruence with the Messianic word? Secondly, does the prophet live what he teaches? Is there ethical congruence in the prophet's own life? Third, does the prophet personally gain from his message? If his message benefits others, and not himself, he is a true prophet. If he is the primary beneficiary he is false. Thus, for example, a prophet who asks for money that benefits himself is a false prophet.

The testing process of the prophetic ministry in the early church was very important because one of the most formidable challenges facing it was the problem of false or

counterfeit prophets. Pseudo-prophets are a problem in virtually all strata of the New Testament and in other early Christian literature. The church is warned repeatedly to be on guard of opponents, defectors or imitators of the true apostles and prophets. Such false prophets have a different spirit and proclaim a different Jesus and a different gospel (Gal. 1:6; II Cor. 11:4, 13ff.) They teach a theology of demons (I Tim. 4:1; cf. Jas. 3:15) that is characterized by greed, and asceticism or sexual licentiousness (Phil. 3:19; Rom 16:18; II Tim. 3:6; Jude 7-8; Rev. 2:20). Finally, they delimit and/or disparage the nature and salvific role of Jesus (I Cor. 12:3; II Peter 2:1-3; I John 4:1-3).

The problem of false prophecy in the early church was so great and uncertainties of discerning it so difficult that the prophetic gift itself gradually fell into disrepute and finally disuse.

The central issue involved in the testing process of the prophetic ministry is a delicate one. The prophetic spirit must be given freedom, but it also must be subject to safeguards and controls. If God has a word to speak to the church through a prophet the church must be ready to listen, but on the other hand, the church must not receive every word of prophecy as a word of God. Paul addresses this problem by relating the prophetic office to the church as a whole rather than to the cult or its leadership as in Judaism.¹⁷ Prophecy is not restricted to a few nor controlled by officials of the cult. All may prophecy because prophecy is a function of inspiration and not office. Prophets are people who have the gift, not people elected to an office. It is the church as a whole which recognizes the gift. Therefore, the church as a whole must control it by discernment of the prophetic word and by those whom it recognizes as prophets. Where this balance breaks down, false prophecy flourishes and the gift of prophecy dies.

The Prophet in Revelation

The nature of the prophetic ministry in the Apocalypse involves two questions, the prophetic role of the writer and the role of the prophets of the church.

The writer, John, is obviously writing prophecy,

(see 1.3). The book contains a mixture both in form and content of judgment on the church and salvation-word. It is a prophetic message that edifies the church through exhortation (*paraklesis*) and consolation (*paramuthia*).¹⁸

The author, however, nowhere is called a prophet. By the authority he claims and commands he stands closer to Jewish prophetic tradition than what we know of early Christian prophecy. The writer of Revelation stands above his community and is not subject to its testing and judgment. The correctness of his words are unquestionable for they are declared true by God himself (21:5; 22:6). John is unique in the early Christian prophetic movement, but he is, nevertheless, a prophet in the church. So great is his stature and authority as a prophet that his relation to the church seems more akin to the prophets of Israel or the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran.¹⁹

The writer may be an atypical prophet in the church, but what about the Christian prophets mentioned nine times in the visionary material of the book? D. Hill has made a special study of these passages, and proposes the following: 1) the prophets exist as an identifiable group in the church. 2) The prophets do not represent a separate class from the other members of the church who are all, in principle, prophets. 3) Prophecy concerns a function and not an office. 4) The prophetic ministry is continuous and congruent with the Pauline understanding of the prophetic gift.²⁰

II. THE MINISTRY OF THE TEACHER

The "gift lists" indicate the existence of a definable circle of teachers in the church. They always follow the prophets in the list of ministries. The teachers are spirit-endowed, just as the prophets, and their teaching must be intelligible if it is to be profitable to the church (I Cor. 14:6).

Antecedents to the Christian Teachers

The ancient world knew of two kinds of teachers, one who imparted knowledge and skill and one who taught how to live. Most teachers in the Greek world belonged to the first type, but not all. Socrates, for example, refused to be

called a "teacher" because he did not want to be associated with the profession. Teachers in Judaism were to give direction to life, especially in the way of God and His law. The method of education was imitation. The student learned by living in close association with the teacher and by carefully imitating his study of the law, his words, his actions and his life. Thus, the context for teaching and learning was "a community of scholars," a teacher and his students living and learning together and from each other.²¹

Teaching in the early church must be understood within the Jewish context. Jesus was the most immediate model for the early Christian teacher. He conducted a peripatetic school. He called a group of people, known as disciples or learners, to follow him and to learn from him by walking and working with him. Jesus looked and taught like a Jewish rabbi, but he did so with an authority and power that distinguished him from his contemporaries.²²

The Role of the Teacher

The ministry of teaching is specifically identified seldom in the New Testament. Acts reports teachers and prophets active in 13:1. Paul mentions teachers in all of his "ministry lists" (I Cor. 12:28-29; Rom. 12:7; Eph. 4:11). Paul identifies himself as a teacher (I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1:11). Church members are cautioned not to seek the ministry of teacher (James 3:1). If the ministry itself is seldom identified by name, the function or role is described often. Teachers in the early church did four things: 1) they taught young converts; 2) they transmitted the traditions of Jesus and the church; 3) they interpreted the traditions of Jesus and the apostles; 4) they taught and modelled morals in and for the church. The ministry of teaching is so important and central to the life of the church that it is the one ministry which deserves "full-time" status and economic remuneration (Gal. 6:6). The teacher deserved such support because his role necessitated education and time to read, study and interpret.

Since much has been written about the role of the teacher and since the role of the teacher is better understood than that of the prophet, each of the roles will be defined on-

ly briefly (bibliographic suggestions in the endnotes suggest the most accessible literature for further reading).

The Teacher of Young Converts. The call to repentance and faith in Christian preaching was followed by teaching about the Christian way. The evidence for such teaching is abundant. 1) It is evident in the baptismal texts. When Paul opposes cheap grace in Romans 6, he says, "*do you not know*" that in baptism believers were baptized into Christ's death" (6:3). They had been taught this in connection with baptism. A few verses later Paul says the young converts were taught "the standard of teaching" (*typon didaches*) and committed themselves to it (v. 17). This "standard of teaching" was concerned with a new way of life contrasted to the old life of sin (vv. 17, 18). Other baptismal texts indicate a similar emphasis. They outline a teaching about "putting off" the elements of the old life and "putting on Christ" as a new mode of life (Col. 3:8-12; Eph. 4:22-24; I Pet. 2:1; James 1:21). Ephesians describes this baptismal instruction as "learning Christ" (4:21). The shape of what they learned is detailed in 5:3-6:18.²³

2) A second body of evidence for such teaching is a series of references in Paul's letters to instructions he gave in all his churches at the very outset of their existence. For example, in I Corinthians 4:17 Paul says he taught the earliest converts of "my ways in Christ." The phrase "my ways in . . ." is a rabbinic one that means "rules for living" according to a certain way, in this case the Jesus way. Paul gives some glimpses of the shape of this way in I Corinthians 7:17 when he says that "my rule in all the churches" is that "everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him." Or, in 11:16 he indicates a teaching that a woman's hair is given her for a covering, and in 14:33 that Christian worship must be characterized by order.

3) A third body of evidence for teaching young converts can be found in a host of specific texts in Paul's letters where he reflects on his early teaching ministry to a church. For example, in I Thessalonians 2:11 Paul writes, "like a father with his children we *exhorted* you and *encouraged* you and *charged* you." The three verbs suggest the profile of Paul's teaching to the young church. A careful study of

the Thessalonian letters indicates many of the things Paul taught this new body of believers.

The Transmission of Tradition. One of the primary tasks of the teacher was to transmit the traditions of the faith. The teacher in the ancient world functioned as the transmitter of the tradition of a people to the next generation. The teacher in Judaism did this with great care to insure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the tradition.²⁴

The teacher in early Christianity was responsible to transmit three kinds of traditions in the church. 1) He passed on the Jewish scriptures as the Bible of the church. He did this both by copying the scriptures and by teaching them to members of the church.

2) The teacher transmitted the Jesus tradition, the stories about Jesus and the words of Jesus. Luke's prologue reports how many "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" "delivered to us" narratives about Jesus. The phrase "delivered to us" is a translation of a technical term (*paradidomi*) which means the careful transmission of a tradition. Luke's Gospel represents "an orderly account" of some of the narratives about and words of Jesus. Paul used the same technical term to report that he handed on the Jesus tradition, e.g. the tradition of the Last Supper (I Cor. 11:23ff.). Often the moral instructions Paul gave to new converts are drawn from the Jesus tradition (e.g. Rom. 7:10 = Mt. 5:32; I Cor. 9:14 = Lk. 10:7), and thus represent the transmission of the Jesus word. We know from Papias, a mid-second century church father, that this process of oral transmission of Jesus' words continued into the second century.²⁵

3) The teacher transmitted the confession, faith and ethical norms of the early church to new churches and new generations of Christians. Paul, for example, states in I Corinthians 15:3 that he is passing on the tradition of Jesus' resurrection appearances as they were transmitted to him. In I Corinthians 11:2 he commends the Corinthian Christians for maintaining the traditions he transmitted to them. He exhorts the Thessalonians to "hold fast the tradition which you have been taught" (II Thess 2:15). The Pastoral Letters are full of exhortations from Paul, the teacher, to Timothy and Titus to hold fast the traditions he delivered to

them and to transmit these traditions to others so they in turn may teach still others. We see here four generations of teachers concerned with the transmission of Christian tradition, those who taught Paul, Paul himself, Timothy and Titus, and the young teachers being instructed by them. The continued and correct transmission of the faith is a special concern in the Pastorals because false teachings and traditions are being set forth and transmitted. The viability and integrity of the Christian church depends on the transmission of the correct tradition about Jesus and the apostolic faith.²⁶

The Interpreters of Tradition. The teachers did not merely transmit the traditions of the church. They were also pre-eminently the interpreters of the tradition. Thus they interpreted the meaning of the Hebrew scriptures in light of the Christ event. The teachers were exegetes; they expounded the meaning of the scriptures and applied them to the life of the church. Paul summarizes this task well in Romans 15:4, "for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction . . ." His persistent and creative use of the Jewish scriptures is testimony to this teaching ministry.²⁷

The teachers of the church also interpreted the Jesus tradition. They applied the Jesus word to the life of the church (see I Cor 11 and 15). They wrote the gospels, each of which represent a distinct and unique interpretation of the meaning of Jesus for the church and the world.

The Modeling of Morality. The teacher in Judaism, we saw earlier, was concerned not only with verbal instruction and cognitive learning. He was equally concerned with teaching by example and learning by imitation. Teachers in the early church followed this Jewish and Jesus mode of teaching as well. Thus, Paul calls his converts five times to imitate him. In I Thessalonians, one of the earliest letters written by Paul, he observes that the young church "learned from us how to live" (4:1). He calls them to further growth by reminding them of the lifestyle of the apostolic team, "you know what kind of men we proved to be for your sake, for you became imitators of us and the Lord" (1:5-6). Throughout the Letter he specifies how he and his associates modelled Christian ethics—they worked hard with their

hands day and night (2:9), they encouraged and cared for fellow Christians as a father treats his children (4:18; 5:11).

The theme of imitation continues in Paul's later letters. The Galatian, Corinthian and Philippian Christians are called to "imitate me" (Gal 4:12; I Cor. 4:14-17; Phil. 3:15-17). In I Corinthians 10:31-11:1 Paul adds "imitate me as I imitate Christ." The imitation of Christ does not mean some abstract example or memory of the past, but imitation as modelled in the life of Paul.

A study of these "imitation texts" suggests several important observations. 1) Paul urges "imitation" of himself only to those churches which he has founded. Imitation presupposes a relationship in history. A leader can model only for Christians whom he knows and who know him. 2) Imitation of Paul is a function of having accepted his gospel. People can imitate Paul because he has converted them and taught them some theology about God and his people. While Paul insists that his theology is essentially the same as that of the other apostles, he is aware that his preaching and way of life have their own distinctive modalities. Good theology is incarnated theology. Imitation is possible when theology is both taught and modelled for a specific group of people. 3) Paul's call to imitation is a call to mediated imitation. It springs from Paul's authentic representation of the Christian faith, and from the perceived need to model the faith for his converts so they can "test" (*dokimazein*) the leading of the Spirit in their lives and conduct. 4) The calls to imitation have an ethical-imperative objective. They are linked with concerns for specific kinds of ethical behavior.

Paul's concern for teaching by example extends beyond new converts. He also asks his former associates and current teachers in the church to continue following his example. Timothy is warned to "continue in what you have believed and learned, knowing well by whom you were taught" (II Tim. 3:14). Timothy was taught a clear pattern of life and conduct; "You have followed my teaching, my conduct, my goal of life, my fidelity, patience, love and endurance through persecutions and sufferings in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra" (II Tim. 3:10-11). But Paul demands even more. He instructs Timothy to hand on to others what

he has learned from Paul, including the modeling (*typos*) for the believers of love, faith and purity (I Tim.4:11). Titus, likewise, is to be a model for the young men in his work (2:7). Paul models for Timothy and Titus who in turn model for their students. What we have in the early church is not only Pauline theology, but Pauline modeling of the Christian faith. Both are equally important and both are to be transmitted to the third generation of Christian teachers by the second generation.²⁸

CONCLUSIONS

There were two teaching types and styles in the early church. The prophet taught by the inspiration of God. The teacher taught by transmitting and interpreting the traditions of God's people and God's special messengers for his people, e.g., Moses, Jesus and Paul.

There are two teaching types and styles in the church today. The experientialist teaches by sharing his/her experience, his/her autobiography. The teacher teaches by exegesis and applying the Scriptures.

What the church today needs is a renewal of both forms of early Christian teaching. Teachers we have, but prophets we lack. Hans Küng reflects on the consequences of a prophetless church. Such a church "declines and becomes a spiritless organization; outwardly everything may seem all right, things run smoothly, according to the plan and along ordered paths . . . but inwardly it will be a place where the Spirit can no longer blow when and where He wills."²⁹

The church can survive without prophets, as it has for many generations, but it will not thrive. The church always needs people who genuinely speak from God; it always needs a living word. The personal testimony may warm the heart. Only a true word from God upbuilds the church.

The church needs prophets. But before the church can have prophets the pattern of church life must be reshaped. The reshaping necessary to encourage and permit the renewal of the prophetic ministry must include the following: (1) the renewal of the communal theology and experience of the church. The church has erred to view prophecy as an individualistic gift. Prophecy is only and always a

ministry within the context of genuine Christian community. Whenever we understand church as a religious social contract of individuals who have "gotten right" with God and who want Christian fellowship there will be no prophetic ministry. Whenever we understand church as the people of God in the world outside of which there are no gifts of the Spirit, there will take place a renewal of the prophetic gift.

(2) The renewal of an eschatological consciousness in the church. The gift of prophecy is an eschatological reality; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit for the people of God living between the times. Whenever the church lives out of the present, when it beds down in history, there can be no prophetic word. Whenever the church lives out of the age to come and thus fundamentally challenges the basic assumptions and ethos of an age, it exercises the gifts of the eschatological reality given her by her Lord.

(3) The readiness to consider seriously new insights of the Holy Spirit. The Protestant preoccupation with "the letter" has "quenched the Spirit." God has spoken a clear and authoritative Word in Scripture, and above all in Jesus. But Jesus gave his people his Spirit to continue speaking and witnessing to him, and to continually guide them in the world. The church's affirmation of biblical authority must be balanced by an openness to the continuing word and work of the Spirit among God's people.

(4) The re-institution of the testing process of the prophetic word. Not every prophetic word is a word from God; in fact, many prophetic words are merely and only words from men and women, even men and women who speak out of demonic powers. The prophetic word must be examined, it must be tested by other prophets, the teachers and the whole church. Genuine and normative biblical authority will be revitalized by such a testing process in the church. The testing of the new and living word from God by the written Word would produce new commitment to live in and out of the Word of God.

The renewal of the testing process in the church will make it clear that there are no self-confessed prophets in the church. In the New Testament no one calls himself/herself a

prophet. Prophecy is a gift discerned by the church and exercised in the church for the edification of the church. All self-styled prophets are by definition false prophets.

If the church needs a renewal of prophecy it also needs a renewal of teaching. The one without the other is disastrous. Prophecy without teaching leads to fanaticism just as teaching without prophecy breeds dogmatism. Prophecy gives vitality, but teaching preserves continuity. Teaching is an indispensable complement to prophecy. The normative role of tradition—the Word of God to his people via Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Paul—sets the boundaries and establishes the criteria for regulating and testing the living prophetic word.³⁰

The renewal of the teaching gift likewise calls for reshaping in the life of the church. I suggest only several things. 1) Genuine biblical study, preaching and teaching must replace the current preoccupation with inwardness. 2) And, concomitantly, the myopic vision of the “now generation” must once again give way to a sense of tradition and history. How I feel right now is not unimportant, but it is less significant than how God has moved among his people in history. The existential needs of my neighbor and/or my own existential needs are not unimportant, but they cannot replace reflection on the long history of God’s dealing with and words to His people. My history happens to go back to Abraham, not just yesterday or the last bad rap. The history that begins with Abraham tells me that God is for his people; He is faithful to his people and saves them even though they experience trials and tribulations. The renewal of teaching calls the church back to this long history of God’s relationship with his people. The flip side of that history is to put the present into perspective, to reduce the significance of the moment.

3) The linkage of teaching and “imitation” or “modeling” is critical for the renewal of teaching. The transmission and interpretation of tradition must be fleshed out in lives that model the truths passed on and expounded. No one wants a return to the double standard of the yesteryear in which “laity” and “clergy” lived by different ethical norms. All Christians live by the same norm. But unless the leader-

ship in the church is called upon and can embody the theology it proclaims, few will understand what it looks like in real life. Teaching that is worthy of imitation calls for teaching that models.

NOTES

- 1 See my "New Testament Patterns of Church Leadership," *Seminary Lecture Series*, 1 (September, 1979), 4, for a comparative listing of the ministries.
- 2 See J.H. Hayes, *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (Abingdon, 1979), 250-283; *Interpretation*, 32 (January, 1978) 3-68, for an introduction to the prophetic movement and additional bibliography.
- 3 See Millar Burrows, "Prophecy and the Prophets at Qumran," *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. B.W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (Harper and Row, 1962), 223-232; E.E. Ellis, "Prophecy in the Early Church," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. Supplementary Volume* (Abingdon, 1976), pp. 700-701; and F.F. Bruce, *The Teacher of Righteousness* (Tyndale, 1975).
- 4 See E.E. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1978), p. 133. See also D. Hill, "Christian Prophets as Teachers or Instructors in the Church," *Prophetic Vocation in the New Testament and Today*, ed. J. Panagopoulos, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, 45 (Brill, 1977), 125; and D. Foord, "Prophecy in the New Testament," *Reformed Theological Review*, 31 (1972), 13, 14.
- 5 See, for example, G. Friedrich, "Prophetes," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6 (Eerdmans, 1968), 854.
- 6 Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic*, p. 142.
- 7 See J. Reiling, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy. Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, 37, (Brill, 1973), 146ff.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 27ff.
- 9 See J. Reiling, "Prophecy, the Spirit and the Church," *Prophetic Vocation in the New Testament and Today*, ed. J. Panagopoulos, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, 45 (Brill, 1977), 66, 67. See also E. Schweitzer, *Church Order in the New Testament*, SBT, 32, (SCM, 1961), 89ff., 139ff.; and H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of*

- the First Three Centuries* (Adam and Black, 1969), pp. 30ff.
- 10 G. Braumann, "Exhort," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, I (Zondervan, 1975), 569ff.
 - 11 G. Braumann, "Comfort," *Ibid.*, pp. 328ff.
 - 12 See H.W. Beyer, "katecheo," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 (Eerdmans, 1965), 638ff.
 - 13 See Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic*, pp. 45ff.; 80ff.; 147ff.; 182ff.
 - 14 See Reiling, "Prophecy," p. 70; and Foord, "Prophecy," pp. 18-20.
 - 15 See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 16.7; 17.2
 - 16 See W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (University of Chicago, 1957), p. 56.
 - 17 See J.D.G. Dunn, "New Wine in Old Wine Skins: VI. Prophet," *Expository Times*, 85 (1973), 7, 8.
 - 18 See Hill, "Christian Prophets," pp. 118ff.
 - 19 See D. Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," *New Testament Studies*, 18 (1972), 410ff.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 406ff.
 - 21 See H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Mentor Books, 1964); W. Barclay, *Train Up A Child; Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (Westminster, 1959); B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Gleerup, 1964); K.H. Rengstorff, "didaskalos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2 (Eerdmans, 1964), 148ff.; J.A. Grasse, *The Teacher in the Primitive Church and the Teacher Today* (University of Santa Clara Press, 1973), pp. 3ff.
 - 22 See R.P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve* (Eerdmans, 1968); R. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1975); S. Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority* (Gleerup, 1978); D. Daube, "Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels," *New Testament Studies*, 19 (1972), 1-15; K. Wegenast, "Teach," *Dictionary of New Testament*

- Theology*, 3 (Zondervan, 1978), 767f.; Rengstorf, "didaskalos," *TDNT*, 2, 153ff.
- 23 See, for example, C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Harper, 1964); R.H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Eerdmans, 1960); R.C. Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church* (Westminster, 1967); G. Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth and New Testament Preaching* (Cambridge University Press, 1974); I.A. Muirhead, *Education in the New Testament* (Association Press, 1965); C. Brown, "The Structure and Content of the Early Kerygma," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 (Zondervan, 1978), 57ff.
 - 24 See Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*.
 - 25 See B. Gerhardsson, *Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (Gleerup, 1964); B. Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (Fortress, 1979); F.F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Zondervan, 1970), pp. 29ff.; Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth and New Testament Preaching*; Wegenast, "Teach," *DNTT*, 3, 772ff.
 - 26 See, for example, A.M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors* (Westminster, 1961); V.H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Eerdmans, 1963); J.W. Fraser, *Jesus and Paul: Paul as Interpreter of Jesus* (Marçhan Manor Press, 1974).
 - 27 See, for example, E.E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1957); R.N. Longnecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Eerdmans, 1975); Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic*; Bruce, *Tradition*; Fraser, *Jesus and Paul*.
 - 28 See D.M. Stanley, *The Apostolic Church in the New Testament* (Newman, 1967), 371ff.; Grassi, *The Teacher*, pp. 57ff.; 85ff.; Muirhead, *Education*, pp. 49ff.; W. Bauder, "Imitate," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1 (Zondervan, 1975), 490f.
 - 29 H. Küng, *The Church* (Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 433.
 - 30 S.H. Greeven, "Propheten, Lehrer, Vorsteher bei Paulus," *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 44 (1952), 29.

PART TWO

TEACHING AGENTS IN THE CHURCH

CHAPTER IV

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

George G. Konrad

I. THE TEACHING PARENT AND THE CHURCH

All Christian teaching functions must be viewed from the perspective of the local church—what it is and what it does. Parents, as Christian teachers of their children, or as teachers of Christianity within the home, also derive this responsibility not first of all from the fact that they are parents, but from their identity with the Body of Christ. "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . ." is the point of departure for a discussion of parents as teachers.

Among the varied functions of the church is its responsibility for teaching or Christian nurture. Both by its nature and by its purpose the church must assume a teaching function. The biological analogy of membership in the Body of Christ through the "new birth" is carried out in the Scriptures in terms of "bodily growth." Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 4:15, 16, "... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Without growth there can be no development of life within the church, and without nurture, there can be no growth. As Graves has stated, "A church does not *have* an educational program, it *is* an educational program. The very nature of the church constrains it to be an educational organism."¹ The same message is implied by the title of a book by James

DeForest Murch, *Teach or Perish*.² On this basis, then parents have a teaching responsibility to their children. Because they are members of the Body of Christ, they participate in the teaching function of the church.

The church not only provides parents with the fact of a teaching responsibility, it also determines the teaching objective and the content of teaching. By and large parents participate in the concern to help their children become responsible members in the community and the church. We want our children to study effectively in school, we want them to obey the laws of the country, we want them to respect their elders, and so on. While all these are legitimate, when we speak to parents as teachers within the Christian context, we go beyond this to the teaching objective of the church. This too can be spelled out in various forms by identifying the numerous Christian virtues as teaching goals in the home. However, more general categories used in the Scriptures refer to the edification of the church (I Cor. 14:12), building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12), building up the body in love (Eph. 4:16), or the most encompassing one, of attaining the "measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Christlikeness is the overriding objective of Christian nurture in the church. Insofar as parents derive the objective for their teaching function from their identification with the Body of Christ, their objective in teaching their children is also determined by the teaching goal of the church. All the goals of the teaching parent must be made subservient to the goal of helping their children become more like Christ. This statement naturally has to be modified by the question of the faith-status of the child, which is too large a topic for discussion here.

One other factor concerning the parents and the teaching church has to do with the church as the true context of Christian education. Frequently we are in danger, both as parents and teachers in the church's educational program, of subscribing to a transmissive model of education which gives primary attention to the transmission of content (e.g. Bible knowledge), while largely ignoring the context of learning, which in the case of Christian education

is the church. Again using the analogy of the body, Paul makes it clear that the relationship to Christ *and* the provision supplied by "every joint" (Eph. 4:16) causes the growth of the body. Robert L. Browning says: "The most powerful education is informal appropriation of values, attitudes and understandings of what a Christian is and does, which comes through participation in the Christian Community."³ The responsibilities of the teaching parent, as members of the Body of Christ from which they derive their teaching function, must also be viewed from this perspective. They participate in the life of the church and are in truth the church in the home and as such can provide the true context for teaching in the home. This has to do more with self-identity and self-awareness than with a variation in content. In our teaching relationships to our children it is not enough to see ourselves in the role of parents; we must also at the deepest level of our self-definition, see ourselves in the role of members of the Body of Christ.

II. TEACHING PARENTS IN THE BIBLE AND HISTORY

Universal education as prescribed and provided in modern Western society, for while generally taken for granted, is of relatively recent origin. Throughout history formal education has been the prerogative of the elite and the rich while the masses were limited to informal learning in the context of the home and/or vocational pursuits. Industrialized society has demanded educational specialization which was not available or as necessary in the agrarian past. Increasingly educational functions have been assumed by the public schools on the secular level. Churches in turn, wanting to emulate the educational trends of society in general, have sought to initiate similar models in the church. In some sense, at least, the discussion of the role of parents as teachers is an anachronism belonging to the forgotten past. How often parents of today experience the fact that their children in public school have outdistanced them in knowledge and understanding. And in addition, increasingly the church of the past decades has preempted the

role of Christian education of children, so that parents are quickly given the impression that their responsibility is limited to and met by assuring the faithful participation of their children in the educational functions of the church. Lawrence Richards has said:

We say that parents are responsible for the Christian church programs to minister to them and thus promote the idea that parents can turn their children over to the church and the church will do the job of nurturing for them.⁴

Historically in the more primitive societies there was little or no provision for various agencies or institutions to assume educational responsibility for children. Education was informal. It occurred in the daily interactions of life as parents together with children and other members of the extended family and the community pursued their vocational responsibilities.

A. Jewish Education.

Every child was a delight in the Jewish home. There were no unwanted children. This attitude is aptly expressed by the Psalmist: "Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; . . ." (Ps. 127:3-5a). Barclay says, "The Jew was sure that of all people the child was dearest to God."⁵

Early Jewish history prior to the time of Ezra has no record of schools for children. Although some educational efforts were introduced with the rise of the synagogue, general education was not introduced until well into the first century A. D. Even when schools were beginning to exert some significant influence in the life of the Jewish people, the focus of religious and vocational training remained on the home. "However high the Jewish ideal of the school, the fact remains that to the Jew the real center of education is the home."⁶

The Deuteronomic law gives some explicit instructions concerning the responsibility of parents for the nurture of

children. There is something awesome about the fact that at the time of the establishment of a new nation which would face overwhelming odds both religiously and militarily, the writer of Deuteronomy points to the home as the foundation for the future welfare of the people of God. "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on him? . . . Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons" (Deut. 4:7, 9). Moses becomes more specific in a later chapter. After he has once again presented the demands and the challenge of the decalogue as the basis for God's covenant with his people, he provides the directive whereby success and blessing may rest upon the nation. "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:5-7).

Many different teaching aids were provided for the people of Israel such as the sacrifices, the feasts and the festivals. All these helped them to focus on their relationships to Jehovah and their responsibilities to Him. However, even here parental education of children remained crucial. So much so that the educational function of the parents became obligatory and part of the ritual, specifically in the case of the Feast of Passover. So Moses says concerning the ritual of the Passover, "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'" (Ex. 13:8). The practice of having the son ask questions concerning the meaning of the Passover with the father providing the answers has been maintained in the Jewish religious life to the present.

The words of Solomon provide a suitable summary of Jewish attitudes toward the importance of the parents' role in the nurture of children: "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother" (Prov. 10:1).

With the resurgence of interest in the teaching responsibilities of parents, the danger exists that an attempt be made to establish a one-to-one correlation with biblical practice and current need. The fact is that in the social and cultural conditions which prevailed in the past, there were virtually no possibilities of providing education for children except in the home. There was essentially no program of general education to which the child from the average home had access. Additionally, there were no church agencies or organizations which had as their objective the instruction of children. Furthermore, the ancient family cannot be equated with the modern nuclear family insofar as it consisted of a larger group of other family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, often referred to as the extended family. Therefore, in reviewing some practices of the Old and New Testaments, it must be done with some caution. We want to abstract some general principles and emphases without seeking to establish a normative practice that can or should be implemented today in its totality.

While taking into account the cultural realities of ancient Israel, we nevertheless note the important place of the child in Jewish thinking and the onus of responsibility for religious nurture resting with the parents. Various community structures, including the extended family, supported the parents in this task without diminishing their primary duties toward their children.

B. The Early Church

Even a cursory reading of the Gospels quickly establishes the fact that children held a position of prominence in the life and teaching of Jesus. All of us recall the compelling Sunday school pictures where children were gathered around the loving Jesus. Despite increasing pressures and demands placed on Jesus and despite the efforts of his disciples to protect him from the intrusions of mothers and their children, He made a special point of acknowledging them. Perhaps his highest commendation of the child was when he used one as the example of the citizen of the Kingdom (Matt. 18:2-4). Although these passages are frequently used as an apologetic for the evangelism of children,

the case can rather be made that Jesus emphasized the true worth of the child in its natural (innocent) state.

Jesus seems to assume that parental responsibility for their children comes to them naturally or instinctively. Even wicked persons "know how to give good gifts to (their) children, ..." (Matt. 7:11). The absolute responsibility toward children is asserted by Jesus in his warning about causing "these little ones who believe in Me to stumble" (cf. Matt. 18:6-14), as well as in his lesson on humility where receiving a child is equated with receiving Christ himself (Mk. 8:36, 37).

With Jesus' stress placed on the importance of the child, one might expect that the remainder of the New Testament would have developed a fullblown theology and practice of child-rearing. Not so. Acts has virtually nothing to say about the child. There are some brief references indicating that somehow the faith of parents will directly impact their children (cf. Acts 2:39; Acts 16:31).

The Epistles also are devoid of any systematic treatment of parental concerns. However, a number of significant statements are made, all of them indicating that the nurture of children is the responsibility of parents. Children are to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). The significance of this injunction is emphasized by the outlined qualification of church leaders. Successful parenting is essential for elders and deacons to assume leadership roles (I Tim. 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6). Fathers are to nurture their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but not provoke them to wrath (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). Parents also have primary responsibility to provide for the physical welfare of their children (II Cor. 12:14).

The New Testament gives no hint of institutional provision for the instruction of children, "... for the New Testament is certain that the only training which really matters is given within the home, and that there are no teachers so effective for good or evil as parents are." There were no schools or teachers for the education of children in the early church. The church was poor and could not have financed the erection of buildings or the hiring of teaching staff. Additionally, there was the expectation of the imminent return of Christ, so that any general education may have been con-

sidered irrelevant in the first and second century. Besides, Christians were a hunted, illegal group, and any institutional provisions were highly impractical and even impossible.

From the Scriptures, then, we must draw the conclusion that the primary responsibility for the nurture of children rests with the parents. Not even the church can usurp this role with impunity. From this brief summary we are compelled to reassess current practices in our churches with regard to the Christian nurture of children.

C. Martin Luther and Menno Simons

The period between the early church and the Reformation presented only sporadic and limited attempts to introduce education for the general public. Most of these were limited by political history or geography. The Reformation under the leadership of Martin Luther signaled a renewed attempt to introduce educational provisions for children of the common people. Luther spoke harshly against the expenditure of funds for various public and military improvements and the parallel lack of funds for the education of children.

Luther also pointed out the responsibility of parents for the education of their children. He encouraged parents to send their children to school and more than that, prepared the shorter catechisms to be used by parents in the home with their children. However, he was generally disillusioned with the ability and interest of parents in assuming this task.

The reasons he gives for the ineffectiveness of parents in the nurture of children have become arguments that have been used by Christian educators and churches down through the ages. He points out that parents do not have the desire to educate their children. Furthermore, they lack adequate piety and are generally unqualified. And within the demands of daily vocational responsibilities, parents simply do not have the time to do an effective job. Therefore, the public school must provide for the educational needs of the child.⁸

Menno Simons did not have the luxury of political support and thus was unable to deal with the question of public

education. However, in his article on "The Nurture of Children," he too highlights the responsible role of parents when he points out that "... this is the chief and principal care of the saints, that their children may fear God, do right and be saved."⁹

Menno emphasized the need for parents to break, suppress or destroy the sinful nature of children. Although he warned against excessive physical punishment, he advocated the use of the rod to help children know the righteous judgment and terrible wrath of God. His concern was that parents set a good example, pray for their children and display a spiritual love which would instruct children in the way of the Lord and avoid spoiling them with a natural or permissive love.¹⁰

Both Luther and Menno Simons identified the significant role of parents in child training although Luther initiated specific steps for some of this responsibility to be assumed by public, albeit Christian, institutions.

III. TEACHING PARENTS AND MODELING

A study of the biblical literature makes it apparent that the major role in the Christian education of children belongs to the parents. However, the Bible provides only few specifics. Another question which needs to be raised is how children learn as members of a closed sociological unit, the family. Although a family is not a totally closed unit, especially as the child grows older and is exposed to the church, to peers, to school, etc., within the parameters of the nuclear family it is narrowly circumscribed.

We are abundantly aware that children learn within the family and that somehow parents exert significant influence on them. In the early years of the life of a child we are frequently amazed at the imitative behavior of children; how in their speech and behavior patterns they uncannily resemble their parents. One can say as a generalization that this learning process is inevitable and there is nothing parents can do to prevent their children from learning in the home setting. Larry Losconcy has pointed out that:

We can no more avoid teaching our children religion

than we can avoid teaching them how to talk or eat or walk. By the time our children are five years their consciences are basically formed. By the time they go to kindergarten their basic attitude towards God and other people is set. In the grade school years they learn doctrine in school and then come home to see what is really right and good and worthwhile.¹¹

The nature of learning within the family can be compared to learning as it is posited for the life of the church. Faith, in the Scriptures, is not only an adherence to certain doctrinal statements of belief; it is a living relationship with a person, Jesus Christ. Within the context of relationships in the church, growth takes place. Change and development occur as the members of the body relate to one another in truth and love, confrontation and support. From this perspective it becomes easier to understand the nature of growth within the family context.

How then does growth take place within the family? And in what genuine sense are parents teachers in the home? There appears to be a high level of agreement among social scientists that we need to look for the origin of personality of the child in dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Something happens as persons within the family relate to each other which results in the formation of personality. Learning, Larry Richards states, takes place "in real situations where effect, interest, motive, perceptions and behavior is united."¹²

The process of molding the child into the "image of the parents" is referred to as socialization. "Socialization, broadly defined, is the process by which the infant learns the ways of a given social group and is molded into an effective participant."¹³ The social group in this case is the family. As the child lives within the context of the family he increasingly becomes aware of acceptable behavior norms of attitudes, and appropriate feelings. Over a period of time he increasingly adjusts himself to become an effective participant. Doubtlessly, this is over-simplified, however, it provides a paradigm which helps us to understand the teaching role of the parent. No aspect of the child's life is exempt from the influence of other members of this social group, the family.

And consequently every area of his development is impacted: motivations, personality traits, and even abilities. Norman Bull agrees with this assessment. He says: "The nature of the child's morality will depend upon those around him—upon, that is the identification he makes."¹⁴

Similar conclusions are being reached by sociologists on a much broader scale to include nations and continents. So that we understand the meaning of the concept, "national character." When we speak of the Americans, the Germans, or the Japanese we already have certain prejudiced views concerning basic personality traits. The underlying assumption is that in a given society the techniques employed by members of that society in the care and rearing of their children are culturally patterned and thus will tend to be similar for various families. Since the members of any given society will have many common elements of early childhood experience they will also have many common elements of personality. As a result we have the development of a national character, traced back to common practices in the raising of children.¹⁵

Socialization is the distinctive process of growth in the life of the child. Socialization includes compliance, imitation, identification and internalization. All of these include the process of modeling whereby a child seeks to construct his behavior and attitudes after the life patterns of significant persons in his experience. Compliance refers to behavior adjustments which arise when the person influencing the child has the necessary means of control. Imitation is simply copying the behavior of another individual. Facial expressions, vocabulary, attitudes, tone of voice, and a myriad of other characteristics may be imitated by the child without conscious thought or deliberate intent.

Identification moves a step farther than the former two. Behavior adjustment is done with some deliberation and is based on the need to maintain a satisfying relationship with another individual or group.

Identification is a process in which a person believes himself to be like another person in some respects, experiences the other's successes and defeats as his own and consciously or unconsciously models his behavior

after him . . . the fact that there is emotional involvement with the other person distinguishes identification from mere imitation.¹⁶

The degree of involvement, namely, total role modeling, and the strong emotional tie with the model are the crucial elements.

Internalization is the final stage in which the child now views the new behavior or attitude as intrinsically rewarding. He attaches value to the new life style in its own right. He has incorporated it into his own meaning and self-definition. Generally speaking, this is what we mean when we speak of internally-motivated behavior.

Socialization is most effective under certain specific conditions. Although a substantial number of variables have been investigated, only a few will be identified here. Four conditions identified by Edward Dager are as follows:

1. Interaction must occur between the infant and some adult or adults.
2. The adult(s) must be predisposed to satisfy the needs of the infant (nurturance).
3. A dependent relationship must develop between the infant and some adult or adults.
4. The adults must have control of the resources the infant needs or feels it needs (power to reward and punish).¹⁷

The relationship of dependency between infant and adult is normative. The adult in the life of the child, usually the parent, controls the resources both for the physical and emotional survival of the child. Predictability in meeting the needs of the infant results in the development of security and relatedness which in turn enhances identification. The control of resources needed by the child virtually give the power of life and death to the parent. When used for the benefit of the child with dependability, identification results.

Several other conditions of effective modeling are identified by Lawrence Richards:

There needs to be exposure to the inner states of the model(s).

The model(s) need to be observed in a variety of life settings and situations.

The model(s) need to exhibit consistency and clarity in behaviors, values, etc.

There needs to be a correspondence between the behavior of the model(s) and the beliefs (ideal standards) of the community.

There needs to be explanation of life style of the model(s) conceptually, with instruction accompanying shared experiences.¹⁸

The last point refers to the function of formal (or informal) instruction or explanations given to the child. The perceptual framework providing the rationale for the behavior parents with children are modeling becomes an essential part of the socializing process. Frequently there are tendencies among Christian parents to satisfy themselves with a consistent life without and verbal elucidation of the reasons for the behavior. The rationale will provide the child with a coherent system which will help him understand his parents and his own behavior in terms of who he is becoming.

In this section we have pointed out the inevitability of the influence of parents on their children. This pertains in all situations because of the sociological nature of the family unit and is achieved through the process of socialization. Various conditions, when met by parents, will enhance the modeling process in the life of the child.

IV. THE CHURCH AND THE TEACHING PARENT

In an earlier section of this paper, the point was made that the teaching function of the Christian parents was derived from their identification with the church, the Body of Christ. At this time another factor needs to be identified, namely, the primacy of the spiritual family over the biological family. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the concerns directed toward the biological, nuclear family. This concern, on the one hand arises from our growing awareness of the deterioration of the family in

our society. On the other it stems from the recognition of the basic socializing impact of the nuclear family on the developing child.

The danger facing us is that we accede primacy to the nuclear family and forget that the church is not constituted of biological family units, but rather of believers, individuals who have committed themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. On several occasions in his ministry, Christ asserted that primary loyalty belonged to him, not to the biological family. Luke 14:26 reads, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yea, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." This statement should continue to serve as a corrective to the churches as they view their responsibility to the nuclear family, especially those families associated with the church by virtue of the fact that there are Christians in them.

The first responsibility of the church in relationship to the teaching parent is to recognize the legitimate role of the parent in the nurturing of children. The parent's responsibility seems clearly delineated in Scripture and is overwhelmingly supported by the findings of the social sciences. The church is not in a position to replace the parent as the teacher of the young. Due to the dependency relationship which exists between children and parents and by virtue of most of the conditions of successful socialization, the parents are uniquely qualified to fill that role. All Christian education functions of the church with children must, therefore, be viewed as supportive of the teaching function of the parents and not vice versa. Parents have primacy in providing the atmosphere of love, the models of right living and the context of discipline and freedom which the children need to internalize those values adhered to by their Christian parents.

All parents, whether Christians or not, will have the socializing impact on their children as outlined above. In this sense the teaching function of parents derives from their natural role as parents. Christian parents, however, have the added dimension that their responsibility as teachers of Christian values stems not from their role as natural parents but from their membership in the Body of

Christ. Both the function and objective of Christian teaching in the home is derived from the church.

Whereas the leaders of the church frequently lament the deterioration of the family we must also look to the church for at least some of the contributing factors. In many instances the church has effectively separated the family in all functions scheduled on Sunday morning as well as in the specialized activities during the week. Although the content of our lessons in our closely graded programs are laudable and doctrinally impeccable and although the atmosphere is often one of life and support, the message of our structures is that nurture towards spiritual growth takes place in isolation from other members of the family. We should not be too surprised that often the lessons of the structure override those of the Bible content so that there is only a very modest level of success in transferring the content to the daily relationships of the home.

The second responsibility follows logically, namely, to help parents be more effective in their parenting role. The absence of any systematic training in parenting in most of our churches is only too obvious. "Parents are blamed not trained," says Thomas Gordon of Parent Effectiveness fame, and this from outside the perspective of the church.¹⁹ Although we readily concede the significance of the parental role, our lack of training provisions for parents contains the strong message that they are in fact of secondary importance in the teaching of children. Research into the phenomenon of child abuse indicates that child abuse is passed on from one generation to another.²⁰ Deductively we can conclude that other parenting patterns are also adopted by children from their parents. The church has the responsibility to help parents break the cycle of negative parenting models.

A third responsibility has to do with the personal growth of parents. Jesus stated that the goal of teaching is for students to become like their teachers. "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). On several occasions Paul exhorts the believers to follow his example (I Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9). However, when all is said and

done, a parent can only model what he is. All instruction in the home will be ineffective where it is contradicted by an inconsistent life. Therefore, the greatest impact of the church in the nurture of children, will not be in the formal Christian education experiences, but in the contribution it makes to the spiritual growth of the parents.

A fourth responsibility of the church has to do with the general loss of the extended family structure. As indicated earlier, biblical references to the family indicated not only the nuclear family as we know it, but also the extended family or even the clan. There appears to be little hope that the extended family structures can be recaptured in a highly industrialized, mobile society. The church, however, is singularly well suited both by its nature and its functions, to provide that extended social structure to help shore up the fissures appearing in the conjugal family.

The family is a common analogy used in the Scriptures to describe the quality of relationships that exist in the church. We are "members one of another." We are "brothers" and "sisters" in the Lord. We have "fathers" who nurture us in the faith and we in turn have "sons" in the Lord. One of the greatest potentials for providing relief to the embattled nuclear family resides in the church. As we establish loving, caring and admonishing relationships within the context of the church, we will be able to provide specific support in questions relating to marital health and successful parenting. The contradictory reality is that we appear least inclined to share our failures with our spiritual family in the areas of marital and family needs. However, the possibility is there and the church has the responsibility, if it is truly concerned with the welfare of the current family, to explore all avenues to provide supportive and corrective relationships and thus recapture some of the benefits at one time available through the extended family.

V. TEACHING FOR GROWTH

The teaching impact of the parent on the child will be largely at the informal, non-structured level. The child learns by watching, listening, touching, hearing and doing. Our society has placed additional demands on parents. The

father is largely absent from informal interaction with the child because of the demands of his vocational pursuits. This means that he will need to make a special effort to compensate for his frequent absence by seeking out opportunities to be with his child. No formal devotional time with the family, although important, can replace the influence the parent has on the child at the informal level. Increasingly mothers also absent themselves from the home in order to supplement the family income or to pursue a career. While there is probably nothing inherently wrong with such employment, the greatest opportunity for teaching might be bypassed, especially during the early years of the child's life.

The modeling of parents becomes the process whereby children learn. The most basic concern for parents then is that they be consistent models of that which they want to teach. Obviously no person can adequately live in full Christian maturity. At that point parents must acknowledge their sinfulness—share their inner states of repentance and hope with their children, and together recognize that there is a perfect model, namely Jesus Christ. Where a contradiction exists between the modeling behavior of parents and their verbal instruction, children will invariably accept the former as the more significant message and identify with that. So it happens that children are learning things we did not intend to teach. Things like "tell the truth except when it hurts." When daddy was pulled over by the policeman he said he was only doing thirty when everyone in the family knew he was doing fifty.²¹

Formal instruction in the home, those times when we schedule Bible reading, prayer, and other religious activities will only be effective when the message is in essential harmony with the behavior of parents. Such instruction becomes the rationale, the explanation for the behavior children have already observed.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has investigated the role of the parent as teacher. The teaching function of the Christian parent in

relationship to his children is derived from his participation in the body of Christ. Both the teaching content and goal of the church guide the teaching activity of the parent.

A cursory look at the Scriptures evidences that the primary responsibility for the Christian nurture of children resides with the parents, not with the church as institution or other formal agencies. Although the cultural realities of the time precluded the use of public agencies and even church agencies, it is noteworthy that the early church made no attempts to formalize any programs of Christian education for children.

The transmission of values, attitudes and behaviors from parents to children occurs in the process of socialization. This process depends for its effectiveness on a quality of relationships between parents and children. Modeling can become more effective as these conditions are met.

In conclusion, the church's primary responsibility toward parents as teachers is to provide them both with the recognition of their teaching role and the necessary support and training to become effective in this responsibility. The church, in a very practical sense, has the potential to become the new extended family.

FOOTNOTES

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- 3 Robert L. Browning, "The Structure and Quality of Church Education in the Future" in Marvin J. Taylor, ed., *Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 141.
- 4 Lawrence O. Richards, *A New Face for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 17.
- 5 William Barclay, *Train up a Child: Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 11.
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- 11 Larry Losconcy, "Actions Speak Louder," in Marie McIntyre, ed., *Parents: Educators at Home* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1969), p. 11.
- 12 Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 82.
- 13 Edward Z. Dager, *Socialization: Process, Product, and Change* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1971), p. IX, X.

- 14 Norman J. Bull, *Moral Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1969), p. 15.
- 15 Alfred Bandura, "Social-Learning Theory of Identification Process" in David A. Goslin, ed., *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 250-252.
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- 17 Edward Z. Dagar, *Socialization*, p. X.
- 18 Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology*, p. 85.
- 19 Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training* (New York: Peter H. Wyden, Inc. 1970), p. 1.
- 20 Kathryn Neufeld, "Child-Rearing, Religion and Abusive Parents," *Religious Education Journal*, Vol. 74 (May-June 1979), pp. 234-244.
- 21 Larry Lasconcy, "Actions Speak Louder," p. 12.

CHAPTER V

THE PASTOR AS TEACHER

Waldo Hiebert

This subject raises one of the most critical questions in the church today: What is the role of the pastor? This question puzzles not only the pastor, but it is also a question which puzzles the congregation. What is the major work that a pastor is to do? The pastor is caught in a maze of expectations from which he can hardly escape. He is verily in a cross-fire. "From the moment a young pastor steps into the pulpit or presides at a board meeting he is caught in the cross-fire of conflicting expectations for the ministry."¹

The pastor is expected to be a good preacher, an effective counselor, an efficient administrator, a dynamic teacher, and a bold leader. Besides, he is to "be good with young people," relate well to the elderly, be an advisor, ex officio member of all committees, and coordinate all activities of the church. Some church constitutions describe the pastor's role in these ways! This job description is not only impossible for a human being to fulfill; it is confusing, frustrating, and unbiblical.

Among these many expectations there must come a prioritizing of duties. On the basis of biblical and theological understandings it must be determined what the pastor's first duties are. The Scriptures have not left us in the dark about this. Let us turn to the Bible and allow it to teach us. We shall examine four strategic Scriptures which deal with this subject.

I. THE BIBLICAL BASE

A. *Ephesians 4:11-12*. Two major contentions are to be noted in these verses: First, special and supporting and

equipping gifts are to be given to the church. They are: apostles (missionaries or church planters in today's language), prophets (we might say preachers), evangelists, pastors and teachers. It should be noted that in some translations there is a hyphen between pastor and teacher (pastor-teacher), indicating that this is one basic function, or one office. Many scholars consider pastor-teacher as being one basic spiritual gift. The pastor is thus described as a shepherding-teacher. So much for the designation of gifts.

The second contention is that these gifts are for the equipping of the saints and for the upbuilding of the body of Christ. It can be said, then, that the pastor is a pastor-teacher, preparing believers for their work of ministry, and working to build up the body of Christ.

This is really a graphic description of the minister's task: Equipping the saints! "Equipping," literally means "to make fit" or "to mend." It is the same word as used for mending nets. To equip means to men, to heal, to put back together what has been torn apart. In a sense the pastor is thus a healer, a restorer, a fixer, "putting people together," so that they can again do their ministry.

Here we should also take a closer look at the word "pastor." What does it really mean? The word "pastor" is a translation of the Greek word *poimen*. The Greek term literally means one whose chief function it is to feed the flock.² The English word "pastor" comes from the Latin *pascere* which means to feed.

The Bible freely uses the word shepherd for the church's teachers and leaders, thereby signifying that the chief task of the shepherd is to provide grass or nourishment for the flock. This is stated in many places, especially in Ezekiel 34, Psalm 23, and in John 10. The pastor then has a clearly defined priority. His first duty is to feed the flock, and he does this by teaching and preaching the Word. This, then, leads us to the next basic text regarding the chief task of the pastor.

B. *1 Peter 5:1-5*. This is a basic summary statement of the task of the pastor. There is but one imperative duty listed here and that is: "Feed (or shepherd) the flock of God that is among you (vs. 2)." And this task is to be done voluntarily, not by constraint, nor for money, but eagerly, and not

by lording it over the people he serves. Again the main duty of the pastor is to feed the people of God, which consists primarily of teaching and preaching the Word.

C. *Acts 5:42*. "And daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." This describes the activity of the apostles in the early church. Without fear they persisted in this dual ministry of teaching and preaching.

It has long been a debate among Christian educators as to the relationship between teaching (*didache*) and preaching (*kerygma*). C.H. Dodd, in his classic book, *Apostolic Preaching and Its Development*, makes a sharp distinction between preaching and teaching. Other writers, like James D. Smart, in *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, contends that such a sharp distinction should not be made. These functions, teaching and preaching, are like two rails on a railroad track, both are needed for proper function. "They are together in being both the service of the Word of God. . .the content of preaching and teaching is the same."³

There are these two ways of presenting the Word of God. Some scholars indicate that preaching is essentially the proclamation of the Word of God to the unbelievers, while teaching is primarily the indoctrination of the believers in the Word of God, but that distinction is overly precise. Both teaching and preaching must be done in the congregation as well. "The minister who refuses to come down from the pulpit and participate in the work of teaching is like a farmer who scatters seed on the land and refuses to do anything more until the harvest. . .preaching and teaching are both essential to a full ministry, and the lack of either one renders it defective."⁴ A pastor who does not preach and teach is unfaithful to God and his calling.

D. *I Timothy 3:1-7*. In this passage the qualifications of a bishop, overseer, elder, or pastor are listed. The qualifications all have to do with moral character, with the exception of one characteristic which is a function: "apt to teach" (able to teach). Of all the qualities the minister is to have there is apparently but one skill required in this passage, and that is that he should be able to teach. This points out

(1) the significance of character (or modeling) and (2) the significance of the skill of teaching. This should make it clear for the pastor that in his preparation for the ministry he learn more than only to preach; he should also prepare himself *as a teacher* of the congregation. Teacher education is of high priority in his preparation.

Before leaving this brief biblical survey, we must offer a summary theological statement, which forms a base upon which our contention lies, namely that the pastor is also to be a teacher.

We see the local church as a body of gifted ministering believers. In their midst are the supporting gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. It becomes their responsibility to nurture, encourage and prepare (equip) these ministers (members) for their work of ministry. In the midst of this "school" (church) or in this miniature theological seminary, (as Findley Edge, calls it)⁵ the pastor-teacher becomes a teacher, an educational director. Larry Richards put it this way: "When we grasp the purpose and servant character of leadership, we can clearly see the pastor as an 'educator.' In fact, we see him as the primary Christian educator in the contemporary local church."⁶

II. THE PASTOR'S ROLE AS TEACHER

A. The pastor is often, at least in function, the education director for the local church. Let's face it, most of our Mennonite Brethren churches are small, 100 members or less. There is only a handful of larger congregations in our brotherhood which may be able to afford a second staff member to guide the Christian education program. Most churches will depend upon the pastor to guide their educational endeavors, in most churches, the pastor is his own educational director.⁷

In larger congregations where an education director is employed, the pastor may not be directly involved with the administration of the educational and training program, but he will most surely be considered as advisor or consultant to the educational staff. There is probably no one else in the congregation who can offer better counsel to the total nurture program than can a pastor.

If I were a pastor again, I would want to have some hand in guiding the education of the congregation. How else can a pastor fulfill his task as an "equipper," if he is not interested in the training of the believers? It seems to me that the pastor's interest and participation in the training program is not only theologically sound, but also educationally consistent with his calling.

Dr. A.H. Unruh, former President of the Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren Bible College and conference leader, used to stress the involvement of the pastor in local church education to the extent that he advised against the existence of a Christian educational committee. He felt that the educational program should come under the guidance of the pastor and the church council.

Never should the pastor look upon the Sunday School, or any part of the educational program as a matter of secondary concern to him, and leave it to another group to control it. Naturally, the pastor cannot and should not get involved with all the aspects and programs of the church. But from Christian education he cannot extricate himself and fulfill his calling.

B. The pastor is further involved in the educational process of the local church as one who definitely participates in the enlistment and training of leadership. Finding and training leaders for the local church program, and for mission activities beyond the local church, is always a crucial task. Jesus, when looking upon a needy multitude said, "pray the Lord of the harvest that he send forth workers into his harvest (Matthew 9:38)." This task may be visualized in two aspects or two parts.

The first task is to discern the gifts of lay-leadership in the church. Certainly the pastor's wisdom and sensitivity is most crucial for the selection of local church leadership. Such potential leaders must be found, tried, encouraged, advised, and trained, and for this significant ministry the pastor's help is needed. His knowledge of the people is helpful in discerning the gifts of the church and their potential.

Secondly, leaders must be trained, oriented and prepared for their task and assignment. We often make the serious error in this process by not offering training for the task. We elect or appoint leaders, send them out to do their

work, but often do not offer them any training at all for their jobs. This is a very common practice, and it is sad! This brings about a lot of frustration and discouragement among the lay leadership of the church. We just must not simply elect them and then put them to work without at least some orientation. The newly selected leaders and teachers need training, at least some kind of orientation or in-service training.

Take, for example, the deacons. They are usually elected by the church, and immediately put to work. Some of these new deacons haven't the slightest idea what they are really supposed to do. They are supposed to visit, but have never been taught how. It is imperative that the pastor (and a senior deacon) provide at least some basic orientation and in-service training to such an important function. Thus the pastor finds himself again in a teaching role. In fact, he thus carries out the directive of Paul to Timothy: "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2).

C. Furthermore, the pastor is a teacher of the entire congregation as such. While there is in most churches a staff of teachers (Sunday school, mid-week Bible teachers, VBS, etc.) no one carries a greater responsibility than the person called to minister the Word on Sundays, and on many other occasions in the church.

There is no other person in the church who better feels the pulsebeat of the congregation, can better ascertain its needs, and is in a better position to give Scriptural guidance to the congregation than can a pastor. It is his responsibility to educate the church concerning its God given task, and to guide the church into a living knowledge of the Word of God. It is the pastor's task to "feed the flock of God." Nothing can substitute for the systematic teaching of Scripture in the congregation. An ancient proverb says, "When there is hay in the manger, the horses will not bite each other."

Findley Edge suggests that the educational aspect of the church is that of a miniature theological seminary of which the pastor is the teacher-president. The church is a

school of Christian discipleship where all are learners growing and maturing in the Christian life.⁸

Of special concern for the pastor should be the membership class, where candidates for baptism and membership receive education and orientation into the fellowship. Some ministers feel that it is not important to have special classes. If there are training sessions, they delegate their task to a deacon, or an associate pastor. This is forfeiting too much. I have seldom found people more open to learn, and with greater desire to grow, than a membership class. Besides offering an opportunity to the pastor to teach a significant group, it also gives him the opportunity to learn to know those people more intimately who come into the fellowship.

III. CAUTIONS FOR THE PASTOR-TEACHER

The pastor who would be a teacher has certain cautions to observe.

A. First is the inevitable pressure of administrative duties, which tends to rob him of his study and teaching time. It is estimated that the average pastor now spends 40-50% of his time in administration.⁹ Then there are multitudes of other duties, visitation, counseling, conference work, etc. which demand time. I once asked a pastor of a large church how he found time for study and the preparation of sermons. He said, "You have to fight for time to study!" If a pastor is not very conscientious and tenacious about his study time, it will be taken away from him by other pressing calls. Yet, the teaching and preaching of the Word is after all his foremost task. He must protect his study time, and request the congregation to help him protect that time also.

B. Another caution that needs to be mentioned is the tendency on the part of pastors to hold on to too many leadership responsibilities and their failure to share responsibilities with other leaders and lay-leaders in the congregation. Pastors find it hard to let go. As a result they run to all committee meetings and group meetings in the church. They even feel that they have to make all the calls upon the sick and shut-ins. Worthy as all these ministries are, they

must be shared, and the pastor-teacher must hold firmly to priorities. He can never afford to sacrifice time for study of the Word in preparation for teaching and preaching. There is constant need for the pastor to review and to hold on to priorities, of which study and teaching is an important one. There are many tasks and duties which a pastor could allow others to do and thus free extra time for himself for study and teaching of the Word. A good biblical model is found in Acts 6:1-7 where the apostles "gave themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word," and chose deacons to care for the widows.

C. Some pastors are not conscientious teachers because they lack the vision for it. "The Christian church is commissioned to teach, but its pastors are not always committed to the teaching ministry."¹⁰ And when this vision and joy in teaching the Word is not there, it is easy to allow pressing duties to absorb all the time.

The minister today is in a real cross-fire of demands. The demands upon the pastor are almost unreal. He is to preach, teach, counsel, visit, administer and coordinate. Today's pastor has only one choice—to draw up priorities for himself. And if he does not have a vision and deep-seated satisfaction in teaching-preaching it will be easy for him to let it drift to 3rd and 4th place on his agenda.

D. Another caution that needs to be given is that a pastor will need refreshing and "re-tooling" from time to time. It is not possible to give out constantly and never to take in. Eventually the well wants to run dry. It is taxing, demanding and emotionally draining to be constantly preaching and teaching. Therefore, it is wise if a pastor takes seriously the idea of continuing education. He may consider requesting the church to allow him a month, or three month "study leave" occasionally. Many seminaries provide this kind of continuing theological education for pastors. Our seminary has had a number of pastors on campus who have come for a quarter, or even a year for study. One pastor inserted a three month study period between two pastorates—a noble projection! As times and circumstances become more demanding, the pastor-teacher will need a periodic break for reflection, for sharpening his tools of communication and for deepening his understanding of the Word.

CONCLUSION

The pastor is a teacher. This is so by design. This is the mandate of the Scriptures. This is the very nature of his work. This is sound theological and educational doctrine. While the pastor has many duties, teaching is a primary one. This priority he must always protect, and guard against the many pressures of the ministry. Teaching is his "blessed burden," his first and blessed task.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Donald Smith, *Clergy in the Cross-Fire*. (Westminster, 1973), p. 13.
- 2 J. Lyn Elder, *Pastoral Care*. (1968) Golden Gate Semanary, p. 11-15.
- 3 James Smart, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*. (Westminster, 1954), p. 19.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 5 Findlay Edge, *The Greening of the Church*. (Word, 1971), p. 177.
- 6 Larry Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*. (Zondervan, 1975), p. 138.
- 7 J. Clark Hensley, *The Pastor or Educational Director*. (Central Baptist Seminary Press, 1950).
- 8 Findley Edge, *The Greening of the Church*. Chapter 8.
- 9 Alvin Lindgren, *Foundation for Purposeful Church Administration*. (Abingdon, 1965), p. 15.
- 10 Peter Person, *The Minister in Christian Education*. (Baker, 1960), p. 15.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHURCH AS TEACHING AGENCY

Loyal Martin

The church does not have an educational program, it *is* an educational program. The very nature of the church constrains it to be an educational organism.¹

Christ's command to the church is clarified in a series of verbs that have come to be known as the Great Commission. "As you go, *make disciples, baptize* these disciples, and *teach* them to do what I have taught you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Evangelism and nurture are then integrally related. Evangelism is bringing people to such knowledge and acceptance of Jesus Christ that they make a personal commitment to Him and nurture is helping them to grow in that relationship. No decision for Christ is made without preparation nor is it maintained without follow up for growth.²

Paul "made many disciples" at Lystra, returning later to strengthen the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14: 21-22). Most of the letters written by Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude are for the primary purpose of edification. Gene Getz lists 137 passages from Acts through Revelation that either illustrate, urge, or fulfill one of these dual activities of evangelism or edification.³

Lawrence Richards argues that we can no longer think of "Christian education" as a *part* of the church's ministry expressed through "educational" (e.g., school) agencies.⁴ Instead, we need to begin to see the total life of the church, all the interactions of believers, as part and parcel of the Church's educational (discipling) ministry.

This does not mean that we can never meet together in a school setting, or for schooling. It does mean that we cannot

rely on schooling as *the* strategy in Christian education. It means that we need to develop a multi-strategy approach to Christian education.

Christians need to see that the nurturing process Jesus initiated by His example, and His command in Matthew 28:19, 20, does not necessarily imply a class or classroom setting. When the church begins to act on this it will be able to see more clearly the function of those activities that are classroom and schooling oriented and relate them to its total life as a nurturing, educational environment. The task of the church, then is winning and nurturing and that task encompasses its total life.

I. GOALS

If gaining disciples and nurturing them is the church's goal, how will the church know when it has finished its task? When has the church won its quota of people? When has it nurtured those people to maturity? Determining when "all nations" (Matt. 28:19, NASB), have been evangelized or even defining what "evangelized" means is not in the scope of this chapter. But a definition of the goals of nurturing will be attempted.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were carnal and immature (I Cor. 3:1), indicating there was a goal they had not yet reached. Hebrews 5:12 teaches that it is possible to revert from one plateau to a lower one in spiritual growth.

Every group has its pet list of beliefs or conduct that rank member's conformity to the group. Consciously or not, a person applies a measure on someone else's maturity when he approves or disapproves of his conduct, attitudes or beliefs. Standards of measurement may be built on family tradition, denominational distinctives, ethnic values or community standards. Too often the standards derived from such sources become a norm for exclusiveness and judging. Sometimes community norms or ethnic values are reinforced by Scripture rather than judged by it. This builds legalism and pharasaical attitudes. Community norms are applied as external measures of worldliness, spirituality and maturity rather than biblical norms of heart attitudes.

Measures of maturity as goal statements about the Christian life must always be derived first from Scripture.

But even among those who seek to describe spiritual maturity from a biblical base, measures of maturity vary. Gene Getz focuses on Paul's repetition of faith, hope and love.⁵ Andre Bustanoby has developed an entire Spiritual Inventory Battery based on knowledge of Scripture, independent study of and personal interaction with Scripture and the ability to apply Scripture to practical Christian living.⁶ His determination of maturity or lack of it can only be accepted if one accepts his premises.

The Bible speaks of both ultimate, that is, eternal goals and temporal or mediate goals for the believer.

A. *Ultimate Goals.* A biblical statement of the goal of Christian education is *likeness to Jesus Christ* (Col. 1:28). Jesus said that a disciple that is "fully taught will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40; Matt. 10:25). "Those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). Paul says the ministry gifts were given "for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13). Paul seems to strain at such lofty statements to preclude anyone claiming or even thinking he has attained it. Christ plans to present the corporate body of believers, the church, to the Father "having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27). And Jude asserts that Christ is able to accomplish that (Jude 24-25).

B. *Mediate Goals.* But despite the impossible nature of those eventual goals for this life, the Bible consistently holds up patterns which are expected of God's children, even before they reach perfection in eternity. The believer's anticipation of perfect likeness is stirred both by God's patience with his imperfections and by God's desire that he move toward attainment in this life. "In this is love perfected with us that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world" (I Jn. 4:17). "We shall be like him. . ." (I Jn. 3:2). "So we shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven" (I Cor. 15:49).

Several catalogs of Christian virtues become goal statements for the believer (Col. 3:12-17; II Peter 1:5-7; Phil. 2:1; 4:8-9). The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is the list of graces God's Spirit is at work building in the believer. That these goals are attainable is evidenced in the lives of individual believers whom many admire. One person is stable, not blown away by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). Another delights his spiritual mentors by his growth and progress (II Peter 3:18; James 1:2-3). One demonstrates the grace of well chosen words, kindness and an affirming spirit. Another demonstrates insightfulness in sensing error.

No Christian is always Christlike. How do believers then call others to be what they have not yet attained? They do it by sharing both their failures and victories in becoming Christlike. This requires a functioning body or "body life" as some have called it. The very nature of the body of Christ makes it essential for every member to function and contribute to the process of edification.⁷ Christian education is concerned as much with the *process* of change as with the *content* of knowledge upon which such change is built. Measuring learning outcomes in terms of the growth of the individual believer and the body toward Christlikeness is difficult. But it does not keep them from the effort toward such likeness "in understanding of life, in attitude, in values, in emotion, in commitment." Communicating that life in Christ demands sharing with one another of all that they are: success and failure, so that through such sharing growth toward Christlikeness may take place.⁸

Fellow believers stir each other to good works (Heb. 10:24). They build each other up (Rom 14:19), admonish and care for one another (Rom 15:14; Col. 3:16; I Cor. 12:25). They confess their sins to each other (James 5:16) and love one another (I John 1:7; 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; I Thess. 3:12; 4:9).

II. DIVINE RESOURCES

In the struggle to move toward its goals the church must keep in mind that God initiated the process. Man is not searching for God nor did the notion of Christlikeness originate with the church. God is concerned with and has

provided for the growth in grace of those who have become His children through faith in Christ.

The Word of God (I Peter 2:2) is God's first and obvious provision to communicate His likeness to believers today. It is therefore the foundation for the believer's study and teaching in personal as well as corporate efforts toward maturity in Christ.

Through prayer God is freed to act in instruction, guidance and understanding of His will for the believer (Ps. 5:8; 86:11).

Beyond that is the direct and personal ministry of both Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ indwells the disciple empowering for service and motivating for right living (II Peter 1:4; John 17:21, 23). Christ works to see His redemption brought to completion (Phil. 1:6). The Holy Spirit also indwells the believers (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19) and teaches them (John 14:26).

III. HUMAN AGENCIES AND METHODS

The church is a teaching agency both by what it does and how it does it, planned or unplanned. This goes on whether the church likes the things it teaches or not.

A building with centered pulpit, communion table in front of it and choir behind it communicates something quite different from one with a split chancel or one with pulpit elevated high above the altar and entered via steep winding staircase. Pews in rows or chairs in circles tell something about what is valued and about the methods being utilized in the particular teaching setting. Pipe-organ or tambourine each model what the group that uses them feels is appropriate. The care given to the premises and the punctuality of service each communicate values held by the body involved. The efficiency of the ushers, the preparation given to the pastor's sermons and the kinds of humor used in the hallways all teach that these are the accepted—and therefore, presumably, right and good—ways to do things.

It is obvious in all this that all of life becomes a school and the church competes with the school, community practices, influential peer groups and the media for a share of

people's attention in order to teach facts, values and change conduct.

The home as God's teaching agency is treated in another chapter in this book. The necessity of a nurturing body of believers has already been pointed out.

A. Agencies

Numerous agencies specializing in various forms of nurture have arisen in the last 200 years of church history. All of these have performed an admirable and useful function. Some have lapsed into tradition-bound patterns that no longer seem relevant. But human innovation has usually created new agencies to meet the felt needs even if the old agency would not allow itself to be replaced.

The Sunday school is hardly recognizable as the 200 year old offspring of Robert Raikes' efforts with street urchins in England. It has become a central institution in the church's nurturing efforts and is no longer a movement. It has become big business. It both supports a huge publishing industry and, by some estimates, involves more volunteer workers than any other agency, religious or secular. At the same time it has become a by-word for meaningless activity. To call something "Sunday-school" is to label it unworthy of serious attention.

Vacation Bible schools originated at the turn of this century and have also evolved into many shapes. Bible study and evangelistic appeal to children have been the hallmark of VBS. For a time it replaced evangelistic meetings as the most likely agency of conversion for Mennonite Brethren children.⁹

Camping was a way of life on the American frontier but became an activity the church used for spiritual enrichment beginning with the late 1800's. Camping, too, has become big business. Many campgrounds now operate programs year round. Some churches dismiss Sunday services and encourage the entire body to gather at an appropriate site for a weekend retreat. Camps are conducted for families, fathers and sons, women, singles, every age group, motorcyclists, fishermen, policemen, writers or Christian educators.

Released Time weekly Bible study was first tried in 1941. Children were given time during public school hours

to study the Bible. Usually this had to be in a site off-campus and conducted by non-school personnel.

Clubs for boys and girls modelled after the scouting programs were developed in the late 1930's. These have become means for reaching non-churched homes for some churches. Such activity oriented programs could only succeed when children were no longer busy with farm chores or in the "sweat shops" of city industry.

The revival of small group Bible studies in recent decades has met a need for fellowship, informal nurture and personal involvement for adults that Sunday school and other agencies were somehow overlooking. The discipline involved in the study program developed by an organization like Bible Study Fellowship demonstrates that adults are still willing to study if challenged. There is perhaps not an hour of the day or night of any week when there is not a Bible study going on somewhere in North America.

Such para-church agencies as Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade for Christ and Navigators have each arisen to meet a particular need. But they have also spawned entire organizations that sometimes rival the local church in finances and effectiveness.

Perhaps the fastest growing agency for training today is the Christian Day School. Twelve regional associations of such schools existed across the United States by Fall, 1979.

B. Methods.

It has already been argued that Christian education is far more than the usual classroom setting. Methods appropriate only to the classroom are, therefore, also inadequate to the total nurturing ministry of the church. That is not to say that classroom settings and methods should not be employed. But the church must never think it has completed its task even when it has done admirably in the Sunday school class or other church-site oriented programs. Those in charge of the Christian education department in local churches know that doing admirably even in the classroom setting is no easy task. Finding willing workers, providing adequate resources and training workers are a major undertaking. Overcoming distractions of the occasion

or poor location, inadequate facilities and motivating learners are real challenges. Perhaps, because just doing well in the setting is such a challenge local church educators have tended to focus mostly on that setting. Why take on the total life situation where total nurture takes place when accomplishing more than average results just in the classroom is already difficult? When there are already a multitude of tools and methods for the classroom, why take on a task for which the settings, tools and techniques have to be tested?

But organized efforts to diversify the nurturing energies of the church are being made. Curriculum materials to aid the church in building the family are available. Some churches schedule marriage enrichment weekends or parenting seminars. Some churches are providing professional counseling to help families and persons in need. Some churches are clearing their calendar of all meetings for one night a week so that the family will not be torn by competing expectations and given the opportunity to be together on that night. At least one Mennonite Brethren district conference accepted its Christian Education Board's strong urging that Monday evening be set aside for family home evening. A manual for use by families is planned. But getting even a majority of the churches to implement this program will be difficult. And the temptation for families will be to take on other activities away from home once the church has cleared a night. And even if a family stays at home, will the time be utilized to build relationships and do constructive things together?

Another attempt at helping the family to nurture has been Sunday School Plus.¹⁰ Lawrence Richards' curriculum provides a link between Sunday school and home by specifying weekly home activities for parents and children based on the study topic of the week. Great stress is placed on modelling by both the children's teachers and the parents. Instruction and reinforcement for the parents' efforts is provided in their Sunday school classes as they study the same topics their children do and plan for the week's home activities. But the commitment required to keep the program operating has discouraged many. Sales of the materials lagged and Richards' publisher quit in 1979.

At this writing in 1980 the material is again available and a Vacation Bible School unit has been added.

In spite of the difficulties, such returns to a family emphasis is a move in the right direction.

Churches have experimented with variations on the vacation church school idea. Some provide a series of day camps for various ages. Others conduct the sessions in backyards in order to help families identify with their neighbors in outreach and model family concern for the community. Still others schedule evening vacation schools for the entire family. Sessions ranging from cake decorating to motor tune-up are offered so persons can interact in whole life situations rather than only in formalized Bible study.

Discipleship as a program has come into vogue in recent years. For some it is little more than a new name for old programs. But as an effort to purposefully nurture individuals toward personally tailored goals of maturity, the discipleship movement must be lauded. "Discipling is defined in the commission as (a) introducing people to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and (b) reproducing Christian lifestyle in them by teaching them to observe (do/practice/live) all the teachings of Jesus"¹¹ In Jesus' example discipling was living together in such close interaction and relationship that the disciples absorbed His way of doing things, His attitudes as well as learning the facts He taught them. Codified into a program by such para-church agencies as Navigators and Campus Crusade, disciple building concepts have been adapted to many settings. Pastors and church leaders are meeting regularly for prayer, Bible study, personal sharing and exhorting each other to grow in grace. This, in turn, is being multiplied as these leaders repeat the process with their disciples. The success of discipling in moving persons toward Christlikeness depends, of course, on the maturity of the discipler and the willingness of the disciple. Jesus spent three years with His twelve and was not always successful in having them absorb all He modelled and spoke.

Even in the classroom oriented efforts at nurturing the local church can offer more and better opportunities for growth. As it is, there usually is little correlation between the teaching efforts in the Sunday school hour, the morning

sermons, the Sunday evening service and midweek activities (adult Bible study, children's clubs, youth group meetings). If a local church coordinated its efforts toward well defined goals of knowledge, to say nothing about attitude and conduct, it could offer the equivalent in time of a three year Bible Institute training in eight years of church services. A three year Bible Institute program totals from 1200-1500 hours of classes. Sunday school, morning and evening services and midweek activities total at least four hours per week or 200 hours in a 50 week year. Eight years of this church input equals three years of Bible Institute. This, of course, ignores the lifestyle learnings that occur in dormitories and school activities. But the local church also has picnics, family gatherings, potlucks and weekend retreats.

IV.TRENDS AND PROBLEMS

One trend of the 70's that will likely accelerate in the 80's in Mennonite Brethren churches is the employment of associate ministers for education, youth, music and evangelism work. Their ability to coordinate efforts should provide more intense nurturing capabilities in the church. But it may be they are only replacing the energies of volunteers who are not as readily available. More men are holding down extra part time jobs and more women are working. Rather than give time to the church they give money to hire a professional. In the process they model to children and neighbors that involvement in the church can be substituted by money.

Over the years churches have moved to graded Sunday schools, worship services, mid-week activities and choirs. Some large churches organize the entire educational ministry horizontally, that is, Early Childhood division, Children's division. Youth division, Adult division and Senior Citizens division. To be sure, attention to the age characteristics of children, youth and adults promotes learnings. But the increasing separation of age groups in the church exacerbates a loss already occurring because the extended family no longer lives together. Persons across the age spectrum are seldom involved with each other. They

cannot learn from or care for each other. New experiments in intergenerational learning settings are in progress. Skeptics may well argue that with this the church has come full circle, back to ungraded systems.

New technology available, such as video tape recorders, closed circuit television, video phones, satellite broadcasting relays could be harnessed to the ministry of the church. But will their use help or hinder? The cold impersonalism of these tools militates against a vital element in the nurturing process. People respond to personal attention. Discipling involves modelling and that is best done in person. So technology must be coupled with personal ministry for a balanced result.

One of the most vexing problems of the educational ministry of the local church is the lack of clear goals. Workers, and sometimes leaders, assume that everyone knows what Sunday school or a club program is all about and where it fits into the total church program. Such assumptions are faulty and lead to frustration. Each local church has a particular personality. Each has its own locale and needs. No denominational office can determine the best program or methods to use in a local setting. These must be determined by those involved. Church leadership must help the church determine needs, set goals, interpret them to the body of believers and insist on accountability by each agency to meet these goals. When goals are not clear the first result is confusion. The Sunday school operates independently of other nurturing efforts. Individual teachers within the Sunday school order their own materials based on their own goals and determinants. Little thought is given to duplication or omission from agency to agency. Whole areas of content or need are omitted. New programs are undertaken to cover these areas of lack. As programs and agencies proliferate competition for talent, time and budget saps the energies of the church. Eventually a goalless climate of anomie results. "The aimlessness, confusion, low level of energy and involvement in these congregations that are not achievement oriented affects every aspect of congregational life. . . ." ¹² The solution is the hard work of determining needs, setting goals and moving aggressively to keep the energies of a local body focused toward those goals.

V. BALANCING THE PROGRAM

One church sees its goals as "win, teach, train and send." Another keeps before its people the goals of evangelism and discipleship. Both of these follow an assertion earlier in this chapter that evangelism and nurture are integrally related.

There is a three way emphasis that can be seen from a study of the New Testament. 1) There is an emphasis on the church scattered for witness and service (Matt. 28:19-20; II Cor. 5:20; Acts 8:4; 11:19). 2) Another emphasis is on the church gathered for fellowship, nurture, correction and sharing (Acts 2:46; Gal. 6:2, 5; Eph. 5:19; I Pet. 4:9; I Jn. 4:7). Then there is an emphasis on the church gathered to teach and build foundations for belief (Matt 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:2; 4:13; II Tim. 2:2; 3:16).

Illustrations of what happens when a local church follows one of these emphases to the exclusion of the others could be multiplied. The following chart shows some results from such unbalance.¹³

Focus on	with	Neglect of	Results in
Evangelism		Doctrine Fellowship	Shallow preaching, false doctrine. Circus-like gimmicks to attract people. No real life change or depth of discipleship. People won but leave.
Doctrine		Evangelism Fellowship	Cold, arrogant, academics. Evangelical gnosticism. Proud of truth correctly stated and held without regard for persons. Isolation. Splinter groups.
Fellowship		Doctrine Evangelism	Pooled ignorance, emphasis on emotions. No depth of life-style or basis for life change. Splinter groups.

Doctrine = Bible teaching, building doctrinal foundations

Evangelism = Witnessing, winning, serving, outreach beyond the body

Fellowship = Nurture, correction, sharing, admonition.

How are these biblical goals to be developed in a particular local setting? Numerous tools for guiding the process of goal setting are available and only a cursory review of the steps can be given here. Questions to trigger the need assessment and goal setting might include some of the following. How many new people is the church attracting per year? How many is it losing through transfer, disinterest? How knowledgeable are the people it is attracting in biblical truth? How mature are they? What areas of Bible knowledge do people in Junior High, or young adult departments lack? What programs have been operated and for how long? What special social or spiritual or physical needs have been overlooked in the body? How well staffed are the programs that are in use? Are the goals of each agency clear? Are they related to other programs? What human, financial and facility resources does the church have? What percentage of the group is involved in at least one activity in the church? How many have 2, 3 or more positions? What attitudes toward learning and Christian growth are there in the church?

Having asked all these questions and drawn a fairly comprehensive picture of need and resource, the church should then move to balance its efforts in the direction of greatest need. But that new effort should not be allowed to subvert the entire energy of the church for a long period or else it will once more become unbalanced in its total program.

A rural church might discover that, while the population is sparse and generally churched, isolated families with children having learning disabilities are open to the caring attention of a few persons. So, one or two families from the church could learn how to tutor children with disabilities. By offering such help and getting involved with the total family, these persons could be won, nurtured and matured.

In the process they could get involved in the church programs already being offered.

An inner city church might determine that it should supplement the flashy TV preaching and entertainment diet of its sporadic attenders with home Bible studies. Low key preaching ministries with a cadre of home teacher-visitors might balance the program for these people and gain greater faithfulness or contribution of energy from them.

A suburban church might find that it has several professional groups that need challenging opportunities. They could develop seminars on topics ranging from work and leisure to middle age crisis to parenting. These would become the basis for nurturing needy persons and getting them involved in more traditional programs of the church.

CONCLUSION

The local church cannot choose whether it will be a teaching agency. It teaches by all that it does. It can only choose how it will teach, what areas of teaching will be given priority and what energies it will focus on its teaching ministry.

NOTES

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- 2 James F. Engle and H. Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong With the Harvest?* (Zondervan, 1975), p. 45.
- 3 Gene Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*. (Moody, 1974), pp. 24-27.
- 4 Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education* (Zondervan, 1975), pp. 119.
- 5 Getz, pp. 54-61.
- 6 Andre Bustanoby, "Testing for Maturity," *Christianity Today* (November 21, 1969), pp. 22-23.
- 7 Getz, p. 116.
- 8 Richards, pp. 21-22, 34.
- 9 Gerry Ediger, "A Compilation of Evangelism Surveys," an unpublished research paper presented at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California, May, 1979.
- 10 Larry Richards, "Why Sunday School Plus?" *Direction* (January, 1977), pp. 21-23. Materials are available from Dynamic Church Ministries, Box 35331, Phoenix, Arizona 85069.
- 11 Bob Girard, "Jesus Models Discipling" *Interchange*, (Fall, 1979), p. 1.
- 12 Robert C. Worley, "Church Education as an Organization Phenomenon," *Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change* (Marvin J. Taylor, ed. Abingdon, 1976), p. 124.
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PART THREE

SIGNIFICANT TEACHING THEMES

CHAPTER VII

TEACHING THE GREAT COMMISSION

Hans Kasdorf

Section VII of the Mennonite Brethren *Confession of Faith* reads: "We believe that the command to make disciples of all nations is the primary task of the church."¹ What a rare statement of faith that is! Rare, I say, because confessions and creeds of the church are not known for their focus on the Great Commission.² They teach about everything else considered worthy for the preservation of the faith once "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3)³ but, paradoxically, rarely include the need for the proclamation of the gospel which brings about that very faith they confess.

That highlights a grave error in the history of the church, namely the error of deleting the "c" from "commission" which in essence is *omission* of the commission. Yet we must be quick to concede that omitting the Great Commission from doctrinal creeds does not necessarily mean that it is also omitted from the church's deeds. Nor does the inclusion of a statement on the commission in a confession guarantee that it is carried out in practice. But there is merit when a community of believing men and women says, "We believe in the Lord's mandate to make disciples of all nations," and underscores: "every member has the responsibility to be a witness to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and to call men [and women] to be reconciled to God."⁴ There is also psychological value in reciting the Great Commission in an article of faith. The more frequently such an article is repeated, the greater is the impression it makes on the repeater.

The Great Commission refers to the missionary mandate which the risen Lord gave to His followers prior to His

ascension (Mt. 28:19). In it Jesus declared unequivocally the divine intent that all people should be made his disciples. The authenticity and trustworthiness of the Great Commission passages have been adequately defended by evangelical scholarship and are here accepted as a given.

In order to see the Great Commission in its broader context we will look at the scriptural content, offer some exegetical comments, point out its universal components, and conclude with practical considerations.

I. SCRIPTURAL CONTENT

Although the best known expression of this commission is given by Matthew, other evangelists express the same idea, only in different forms. This provides the church with a broad foundation on which to base its missionary outreach. My main focus will be on the Matthean text, particularly under "Exegetical Comments." But I will draw supplementary insights from the accounts given by other Synoptic writers, the Gospel of John, and Acts.

A. The Matthean Text

The words of the Great Commission are given in the final paragraph of Matthew, beginning at verse 16. For the purpose of getting the full impact of the text I have chosen to quote it in two translations:

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.
17 And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them.
17 And when they saw Him they worshiped [Him]; but some doubted. 18 And when Jesus had come close, he said to them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

19 Therefore, having gone forth, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age"

(D. Ewert).⁵

The text is no afterthought of our Lord; "it is no mere appendage loosely attached to the end of the first gospel, but an integral part of its entire message."⁶ The entire message of the gospel is, in turn, an integral part of the whole Bible. This is important to note, lest we sever one small segment from the whole corpus of biblical revelation. Not only the Great Commission passages but the entire biblical message "is inspired by God and profitable for teaching" (2 Tim. 3:16).

"Mission was formerly based a little too one-sidedly and (even) almost exclusively on this 'great commission'," observes a Dutch theologian and mission teacher, with reference to Jesus' pronouncement recorded by Matthew. "But," he continues, "the fault lay not in the fact that mission was based on *this* declaration, but in fact that Matthew 28:18-20 was isolated from the whole of the Biblical witness."⁷ We must guard against a one-sided approach in both teaching and fulfilling the Great Commission.

B. Mark's Record

Mark's account of the Great Commission is found in the so-called "Longer Ending" of the resurrection story.⁸ The setting was in a house. The eleven disciples were around the table eating a meal. Jesus rebuked them because they refused to believe that He had risen from the dead. Mark records the Great Commission from the conversation between Jesus and his disciples.

The unique features of this record are: (a) The Master's mandate to "preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:16 NIV) or "all created ones" (Schlatter); (b) the assurance of salvation to everyone "who believes"; (c) the pronouncement of condemnation upon those who respond in disbelief; and (d) the promise that various "signs will accompany those who believe" (16:17-18). Professor D. Edmond Hiebert of the Biblical Seminary in Fresno comments:

These signs were the authenticating credentials of the apostolic message exhibiting the presence of the living Christ working with and through His messengers. They served not to accredit the faith of the individual but the validity of the faith he represented.⁹

Hiebert believes that the infant and young church needed these signs and that the adult and mature church will not be without them.

C. Luke's Account

The central focus of the Lucan record of the Great Commission is on *witness*. Not only does Jesus explicitly declare the disciples to be *witnesses* (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8), but the setting in which he gave the Great Commission clearly demonstrates that fact.

First of all, they were *witnesses* with the respect to the past. In a post-resurrection encounter with two disciples on the road to Emmaus Jesus presented himself as the Master Teacher. He expounded to them the entire collection of Old Testament predictions concerning himself, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets. . . and the psalms" (24:27, 44). It is likely, as the Dutch missiologist Johannes Bavinck suggests, that Jesus began with Genesis 1:1, declaring unequivocally God as the Creator of heaven and earth.¹⁰ The meaning is: God has created everything, and everything is within the sphere of his interest.¹¹ Luke adds that their hearts burned "while he opened [to them] the scriptures" (24:32).

These scriptures stood on their side as the undefeated historical witness and were to become the very content of

their preaching "in his name to all nations" (24:47). When the two disciples came to Jerusalem they became *witnesses* to other disciples of "what had happened on the road" (24:35).

Secondly, they were *witnesses* with respect to the present. In addition to the witness of Scripture touching Christ's resurrection, Luke records two instances which helped to convince the disciples that Christ was alive, indeed. One had to do with the Lord's actual physical body: "See my hands and my feet that it is I myself" (24:39). The other had to do with what was later to become a vital sign of the church, His spiritual body. As he ate, they recognized Him. As the church breaks bread, it acknowledges Him as Savior and Lord "until He comes."

Thirdly, they were *witnesses* with respect to the future. The Great Commission is solidly rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. But there is also a future dimension to be noted. When Jesus declared it, he actually pronounced a task of macrocosmic proportions in the whole context of salvation history, namely "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem." Then he declared to the disciples: "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47-48). In Acts 1:1-8 Luke elaborates on the commission, turning from the historical record to eschatological promise and fulfillment; (a) "You shall receive power"; and (b) "You shall be my witnesses." The coming of the Holy Spirit to take possession of Jesus' followers will always result in *being* witnesses for him.

D. The Fourth Gospel

John's record of the Great Commission (John 20:19-23) adds another dimension, namely the centrality of Christ's *sentness* by the Father and Jesus' act of *sending* the church. Whereas Luke's focus is on the *witness* as he reflects on the past and underscores the continuity of salvation history from the Old Testament to Christ and the church, John begins with the *sentness* of Christ and projects the continuity of that *sentness* in the future mission of the church.

The *sentness* of Jesus has great implications for the

sending of the church, as the missionary statesman and Bible teacher, John R. Stott, points out. The key phrase is "I send you."

First, the personal pronoun "I" represents the emphatic form of the Greek word "ego" and "expresses the authority of the sender."¹²

Second, the verb "send" represents the action of the Son's sending by the Father and the church's sending by the Son. The only difference is that the Son was sent on His own merit, whereas the church is sent by the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is this word "send" which expresses the heart of the Great Commission in John's gospel.

Third, the final word "you" refers in the first place to the apostles who were present when Jesus spoke. However, it is not restricted to them as Luke's account indicates (Luke 24:33). As Jesus was *sent by the Father*, so *He sends* the whole church for the Father into the world. The church in turn is *sent to send*.

In his commentary on John, B.F. Westcott (1825-1901) differentiates between the apostle's use of the tenses in "has sent" and "I send." The mission for which Christ was sent by the Father had not yet reached the point of historical fulfillment. The effects of his acts were still to be continued. "The apostles were commissioned to carry on Christ's work, and not to begin a new one."¹³ This agrees with Luke's commentary to Theophilus in Acts 1:1 where he writes that he has "dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach." The implication is that the disciples or the church are to carry out the work Christ began. The dimension of *sentness* in the Great Commission is to be understood as an ongoing process between the resurrection and return of Jesus Christ.

E. Paul's Reiteration

When the Lord years later revealed Himself to Paul, the special apostle or missionary to the Gentiles, He reiterated another form of the Great Commission in a singular manner saying,

I send you [to the Gentiles] to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of

Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:17-18).

We know that Paul was not present at any of the occasions when Jesus gave the Great Commission to His pre-Pentecostal followers. Nonetheless, he stands in a long line of eyewitnesses who saw the risen Lord. In fact, when we read his account of Christ's post-resurrection appearances (I Cor. 15:1-8), it seems as though he were paraphrasing the Lucan record of the Great Commission (Luke 24:44f.). Jesus, however, considered the Great Commission of such primary importance that he gave a special version of it to Paul himself (Acts 26:17) or to Ananias especially for Paul (Acts 9:15-16), or both.

The tragic fact of which G.W. Peters speaks when he says "that the Great Commission has been more debated than it has been obeyed in church history,"¹⁴ does not apply to Paul. He had a distinct awareness that "all nations" must hear the gospel (Romans 1:5). He obeyed the Lord's commissions as the Lord himself had obeyed the Father's commission—"even unto death."

II. EXEGETICAL COMMENTS

I want to underscore again that the Great Commission has a broad base: The entire Old Testament and all the teachings and precepts of Jesus up to the time when it was given. If the world mission of the church were to rest only on the isolated texts in which the words of the commission appear the whole missionary enterprise could be likened to a gigantic "pyramid built upside down" and would not stand the tests of time. Former Colombia missionary David Howard reminds us that we must realize this fact. He maintains "that the missionary mandate of the church is actually a pyramid built right side up with its base running from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22." Thus the "scope of biblical teaching" on world mission, says Howard, encompasses the entire complex of redemption history.¹⁵

A. The Historical Setting

It is imperative to our understanding of the Great Commission that the gospel account relates a real event in time and space (Mr. 28:16-20).

1. The time is to be noted. "Now [or then] the eleven disciples went to Galilee" (v. 16a). This simply indicates continuation of the post-resurrection narrative.

From both Luke and John we learn that the Lord gave the Great Commission on the day of his resurrection when he for the first time met with the disciples in a house in Jerusalem (Luke 24:1f., 13f., 33f.; John 21:19f.). But Matthew obviously reports a different occasion. The meeting had been preplanned by the Lord himself (Mt. 28:10). The risen Christ had made an appointment with his followers to meet at an appointed time and to reveal himself and God to them. But this moment of time between resurrection and ascension has wider implications. "This revelation of Jesus' presence, placing the faithful in the center of time," says one commentator, "disclosed to them the past and future work of God."

2. The place is also important in the setting. The text says that the "disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them" (Mt 28:16). To make sure that they would be informed of his intent to meet them at his favorite spot he left very clear instructions, once with the angel by the empty tomb and once with the women who had seen him alive. The angel commanded the women, "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. . . he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him" (Mt. 28:7). On the way to the disciples the women met Jesus personally. He greeted them, "Hail!" and said, "go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee and there they will see me" (Mt. 28:9-10).

The greatest teachings of Jesus as recorded by Matthew had been given either by the sea side or on a mountain. Jesus loved the rendezvous with his followers on the mountain top and thus he chose to give the final instructions to his disciples in Galilee where he gave them the first. In his exposition of the Matthean text the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) makes a pertinent observation.

Significantly, Matthew leads Jesus' history back to the place of its origin (Mt. 4:12-17); to the Galilee of the Gentiles, to the people who walked in darkness and have seen a great light. The history of the end stands in continuity with the previous events in the life of Jesus and the history of Israel which in turn point to the end.¹⁷

The mountain on which our Lord gave the Great Commission as recorded by Matthew may have been the one on which he gave the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), or the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17), or as the British commentator Tasker suggests,¹⁸ the mountain where Jesus had originally commissioned the Twelve and given them the restrictive instructions to go only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 10:6). But the exact geographical identification of the mountain is less important than the event that took place there. "It is as if Jesus were saying," contends Howard, "As I began my ministry to preach repentance here in Galilee, I am now commanding you to go from here to all nations with the message with which I am entrusting you."¹⁹

3. The final thing to note is the encounter between Jesus and his disciples. Matthew states that the eleven disciples had gone to Galilee. But it is very likely that the women who had met him in Jerusalem (28:8-10) were also there. It is also conceivable that the "five hundred brethren" of whom Paul speaks (I Cor. 15:6) may have been present at this meeting.²⁰

Many things must have begun to make sense to his followers. No doubt, they recalled that memorable meeting on Mount Olive between the Last Supper and the crucifixion when Jesus had said to them, "It is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (Mt. 26:31-32). It is evident, then, that that post-resurrection meeting in Galilee was to be an important event to both the Lord and his disciples.

"And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted" (28:17). The encounter in Galilee is highlighted by two reactions standing in opposition to each other. The first reaction is worship. The women had already worshiped him in Jerusalem on the day Christ had risen

(28:9). Now in Galilee the circle of worshipers had increased and it will increase still more when they will worship him at his ascension (Luke 24:51) and even more when he will return and "every knee. . . in heaven and on earth and under the earth" shall bow "and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10-11).

There is no recorded incident that the disciples worshiped Jesus prior to his resurrection. But now they recognize in him the *kyrios*, the LORD. "Worship is offered in the presence of the revealed God", says Barth. "Jesus encountered them as God, and they encounter him now as worshippers."²¹

The second reaction in the encounter is doubt. There were some in the group who doubted. The word used for doubt (*distazo*) is not so much an expression of unfaith or disbelief; it implies much more a sense of confusion or perplexity.²²

How often had Jesus gathered his disciples around himself during the three years of teaching and preparation for his final meeting. But this meeting is different from all the others. He is no longer the one who will go to Jerusalem in order to suffer and die and to rise again. He is now the one who has been in Jerusalem, who has suffered and died "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The things Moses and the prophets and the poets had written about him had been fulfilled, indeed! (Luke 24:44).

B. The Actual Components

One way to gain a clear perspective of the Commission itself is to itemize the major components.²³

1. *The Lord's Claim of Authority.* "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (v. 19). This claim of authority is both *exclusive* and *inclusive*. It is *exclusive* in that there is no one else to whom this *exousia* or power has been entrusted; it is *inclusive* in that there is neither any celestial nor terrestrial sphere that is not encompassed by the omnipotence of the Lord Christ.

Christ's pronouncement of authority presupposes the event of the ascension or enthronement, though chronologically this event had not yet taken place. This

thought is best understood in the context of the prophet's prediction in Daniel 7:13-14 and the apostle's announcement in Philippians 2:9-11, as Otto Michel of Tübingen has pointed out.²⁴ What Daniel 7:13-14 predicted, Matthew 28:18 regards as fulfilled. Michel paraphrases and quotes: "The Son of Man came on the clouds of heaven, was presented before the Ancient of Days, and given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." It is well to bear in mind that the scene described here reflects a common ceremony of enthronement of a King, comprising at least three events:²⁵ (a) that of exaltation or introduction of the person; (b) that of presentation or declaration; and (c) that of the enthronement proper or transfer of power. Jesus claims all this. The phrase, "has been given" indicates timelessness.²⁶ He holds authority forever!

Truly, Jesus is Lord! The kingdom is his, and he is its King. Indeed, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). "The immeasurable greatness" of God's power has been given to Christ when he was raised from the dead and exalted "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:19-21). Christ's claim of authority made on the mountain in Galilee is affirmed by "loud voices in heaven": "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

2. *The Lord's Charge to Make Disciples.* "Therefore, having gone forth, *make disciples of all nations*" (28:19 Ewert, italics/mine). Gustav Warneck (1834-1910), German missionary statesman, called this commission the *Magna Charta* of our Lord.²⁷

We should note several things in connection with this commission. The first is the word "therefore." The mandate to make disciples of all peoples presupposes the claim to cosmic power on the part of Jesus, the absolute authority. Behind the commission of verse 19 stands the Commissioner of verse 18. He assures the execution of the command over against both the disciples' weakness and any in-

terference by a third party."²⁸ Christ's authority on earth had already been great, but now it is boundless!

We do well to remember that our resources in Christian witness are not within ourselves, but in Christ's unlimited resourcefulness. He has the authority to give the Holy Spirit to empower the powerless. And even though the historical event of Pentecost was still to come, there was already power and passion on this Galilean mountain.

Surely, the disciples must have been reminded of another mountain scene where Christ in a prayer "uttered the Manifesto of His Kingdom," as G. Campbell Morgan, that prince among Bible expositors, has put it.²⁹ Two things must have become clear to them: (a) that it always was God's will for heaven and earth to give Christ absolute power over these spheres; and (b) that the disciples themselves in the dynamic of that power were to make all peoples what they themselves were—disciples.

The second thing to be noted is the command itself: "Make disciples!" It is imperative in form and meaning—the only imperative verbal form in the entire paragraph beginning with verse 16.³⁰ In fact the words "make disciples" (*matheteusate*) is the only grammatical imperative in any of the Great Commission accounts given by the evangelists. The frequently stressed phrase "go ye," as the Authorized Version renders it, is not an imperative, but rather a participial form meaning to "pass from one place to another." It is thus better translated by "having gone" or "as you go" make disciples. The Lord of heaven and earth has so much confidence in his followers that he takes their *going* for granted but not the weightier matter of making disciples. The latter basic command presupposes the former fact that Christians have already gone and are already on the scene of discipling activity. That means that unless we go to the undisciplined we will never disciple them. But it does not mean that we will always make disciples even *if we go*. Thus Christ underscores *disciplemaking*, not *going*. "In a thousand missionary sermons," says Robert D. Culver of Dallas Theological Seminary, this common interpretation of *going* and what has gone into it "is both naive and, in part, erroneous."³¹ All too often this emphasis has geograph-

ically focused on "foreign missions" rather than biblically on "world mission"; it has glamorized the foreign and distant at the expense of disciplinemaking *wherever* disciples live a life of discipleship among the nondisciplined.

Nonetheless, the whole matter of *going* is of utmost importance. The Christian religion is not centripetal, based on a "come-structure"; it is centrifugal, based on a "go-structure." The imperative "make disciples" presupposes the aorist participle "having gone."

Thirdly, we note the object of the mandate: "all the nations" or peoples (*panta ta ethne*). This speaks of the universal scope of the charge. But it is more than that. Ever since Warneck, the founder of evangelical science of mission, many people involved in the task of disciplinemaking have taken Christ's commission rather literally. Like Warneck himself, they interpret these words "all peoples" to mean an entire people such as a tribe, a clan, a family or a homogeneous unit in society rather than isolated individuals. They recognize that in many cultures people make communal rather than individual decisions. A Western mind trained in and conditioned by a philosophy of individualism finds it hard to comprehend that people can convert in groups. That does not mean that there is no personal decision; but it is often multipersonal, not individualistic. There is a wealth of older as well as current missionary literature to illustrate my point.³² The Holy Spirit moves where he wills. He often convicts and converts every responsible member in a given culture and through these converts brings a whole people to Christ. These first generation Christians, then, become responsible for discipling subsequent generations.

Such is the object of Christ's charge. Not only isolated "Korneliusseelen" (Cornelius souls) must be saved, but entire peoples must become *disciples*. A disciple not only counts the privilege of being "saved", he pays the price for following Christ in life.

Fourthly, Jesus also says something about method and means of disciplinemaking. The two words he uses to describe the process are *baptizing* and *teaching*. Each of these present participles is modified—the one by the prepositional phrase, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

Holy Spirit"; the other by an infinitive clause, "to observe all that I have commanded you" (28:19). Baptism speaks of an new relationship—the relationship to the omnipotent Lord; teaching speaks of a new ethic—the ethic of the kingdom of the omnipotent King.³³

From the context of the other Great Commission passages, already referred to, it becomes clear that the matter of repentance (Lk. 24:47), forgiveness of sins (Lk. 24:47; John 20:23), and faith or trust (Mark 16:16) is of prime importance in disciplinemaking. Matthew (28:19) and Mark (16:16) point out that baptism is likewise very important in the process. In Jesus' day baptism certified the renouncement of the old and acceptance of a new state or position. Baptizing someone in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit means that his loyalty now belongs to this Triune God.³⁴ Added to this, says the late Swiss commentator, Fritz Rienecker, are several new aspects that give baptism its real meaning. One is that Jesus himself entered baptism (Mt. 3:13f.). Furthermore, his death and resurrection provided new content for baptism. Thus water baptism of believers signifies dying with Christ and rising with him to a new life (Rom. 6:1ff.).³⁵

This brings us to the next point, namely that of teaching. The process of making disciples demands ongoing instruction, a theology of Christian nurture, a setting in which the new converts are not only fed information, but have the chance for observation. What counts, says Jesus, is that they are being taught "to observe all that I have commanded you" (28:20). This is a broad curriculum when we think of *all* that Jesus taught by word and deed. He lived what he taught. In a nutshell, what Jesus commanded his disciples was to *be* his followers (Lk. 9:23f.; Mt. 10:38f.). As Jesus modeled what he taught, so the disciples must model as they disciple others. But they cannot model themselves; they must model Christ. The life pattern of a disciple must be determined by the life of Jesus Christ. All too often, "even in mission work," says Richard De Ridder of Calvin Seminary, "we try to make others like ourselves! How easy it is to pattern an emerging church after a church in a foreign society."³⁶ As we make disciples it is crucial that we teach what Jesus commanded and lived.

C. The Eschatological Promise

When Jesus was about to step onto the platform of this *kosmos* as the Savior of the world, he was introduced by God's angel as the "*Emmanuel*, which means, God with us" (Mt. 1:23). Now when he is about to step off the cosmic platform, he himself promises that divine presence to continue with those who make known that Jesus redeems: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:20). This is the real "support system of world mission" as Elmer Martens, president of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary recently said.

It is not difficult to trace the echo of the promise of God's presence with his people throughout salvation history. "I am with you," the Lord said to Jacob (Genesis 28:15), to Moses (Exodus 3:12), to Israel (Is. 42:6), and to the prophet (Jer. 1:18). The Old Testament people of God knew God as *Yahweh* or Lord. "That," he said, "is my name" (Is. 42:8). The New Testament people of God know him as *Kyrios* or Lord of power in heaven and earth.

The end times are the times of world mission which last from the Lord's resurrection until his return. These eschatological times have begun, but they are not yet consummated. "I am with you always" is the promise of presence following the command to make disciples of all nations. "The presence of Christ is *the* great gift to His disciples," says Blauw. As *Yahweh* expressed his presence to Israel, his servant, so Jesus promises his presence to the church, his servant among all peoples.³⁷

Perhaps nothing has been more encouraging to the followers of Jesus throughout history as his personal presence with them in world mission. Prior to his crucifixion Jesus said to his disciples, "I am going to him who sent me" (John 16:5). But "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever" (Jn. 14:16).

After his death and resurrection Jesus reassured the disciples of his abiding presence in the person of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8). John (21:22) records that Jesus actually "breathed on them," saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Upon his exaltation to "the right hand of God," Jesus

himself "received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:33) and gave him as a guiding and abiding presence and as a dynamic power to make disciples of all peoples until his return in glory.

III. UNIVERSAL COMPONENTS

I have already referred to the universal scope of the Great Commission. But there are at least four explicit components of such comprehensive proportion that they merit separate treatment. The word *all* is used in *all* authority, *all* peoples, *all* things, and *all* days.

As stated earlier, Christ's claim of power is both exclusive and inclusive. The personal pronoun "me" clearly indicates that Jesus draws attention to himself as the bearer of "all authority in heaven and on earth." That is the gift from his Father. "In this whole world," says Bluaw—be that visible or invisible, be that evil principalities of heavenly domains or worldly powers of earthly dominions—"has been wrested from the grip of any other powers whatsoever."³⁸

Worldly rulers throughout history have grabbed for power to subdue and oppress, to exploit and possess, to subject and distress. But their source of power is in the god of this world, called "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). In world mission these powers are a reality both in the spirit world and in the world of human despots.

In the midst of all this the missionary as every follower of Christ hears him declare: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*"

A. The Universality of Christ's Purpose

"The fundamental basis of all Christian missionary enterprise," John Stott reminds us again, "is the universal authority of Jesus Christ." From this power emanates the purpose: "Make disciples of *all* nations."³⁹ This is an unprecedented commission. The Master had given many mandates prior to this universal charge. But they were all

narrow in scope. There is, for instance, the ethnic commission to go "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," preaching "the kingdom of God" (Mt. 10:5-7); there is the pastoral commission to feed the Lord's sheep (Jn. 21:16); there is the sociological commission to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mt. 22:39); then there is the theological commission to "love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:37). But none of these mandates has that universal dimension as the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is a great turning point in salvation history. Hitherto the focus had been more on the "lost sheep of Israel"; henceforth it is as much on the lost peoples from the "Gentile lands," as Karl Barth puts it.⁴⁰ This does not exclude Israel, but it includes all peoples. Our globe today hosts 223 independent nation states⁴¹ and an estimated 4.2 billion people who are divided into 16,750 sub-cultures and speak more than 5,000 mutually unintelligible languages.⁴²

The marching order is upon the church to make all peoples disciples of Jesus by proclaiming that God's Son became incarnate man in this world, that he suffered, died, and rose that *all* might have forgiveness of sins and be reconciled to God.

In order to make disciples of all nations, of all peoples, of all ethnic groups, of all tribes, and of all geographic frontiers, ethnic borders and linguistic barriers as well as social and cultural divisions, the church must continue *going forth* and, *having gone*, make disciples. Blauw is right: "The making of disciples can happen only in a movement of the disciples of Christ towards all nations."

B. The Universality of Christ's Precepts

Jesus specifies in the Great Commission that teaching young converts *all* he has commanded is an integral part of discipling. Disciples are made, not born, faith and life must be patterned after his precepts. Even children biologically born to Christian parents must be spiritually reborn and then nurtured by teaching them *all* things *Jesus* commanded. Both the person who commanded, and *all* that he

commanded are important. Blauw's observation is so pertinent that it deserves to be quoted at length:

The *total* dominion over the *total* world of men must also come to expression in a *total* dedication and submission to what Jesus had commanded. That is not to say that life is to be submitted to a new impersonal *law* or legalism; it seems of great significance to me that there is no reference her to the "commandments of Jesus", but of "what I have commanded". The obedience is determined by the relation to Jesus Christ Himself, not by a conformity to an impersonal commandment.⁴³

The command to teach *all* things is universally binding on both the discipler and the disciplined. The one must obey the Lord and simply carry out his task and teach by word and deed; the other must obey and observe in daily living the things taught. This goes beyond mere indoctrination; it means new life formation. What must be clear beyond the shadow of a doubt, says Warneck, is "that Christianity does not merely bring a new teaching which is to be believed, but a new life which is to be lived."⁴⁴

The church, of course, must provide the context for teaching *all* things Christ commanded, as Elmer Martens observes. "When Paul established churches," says Martens, "he appointed elders whose work it was to take what they had 'heard. . . in the presence of many witnesses, entrust it to faithful men who would be able to teach others also' (II Tim. 2:2)."⁴⁵ This involves ongoing teaching and training, not in isolation, but in community and fellowship with believers. G.W. Peters is right in saying that "Christian disciples are not produced in moments of time, in isolation or in a doctrinal vacuum. Time, fellowship and teaching are not only important; they are essential."⁴⁶ "Teaching *all* things" is an ongoing process in disciplemaking until Jesus returns.

C. The Universality of Christ's Presence

In his classical hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," Martin Luther (1483-1546) made this humble confession:

When we on our own strength rely
We struggle, but are losing.

Then he adds:

But win when He is on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing.

The disciplemaker has the assurance that the "man of God's own choosing" is on his side *all* the days. That gave Paul, the great discipler, the boldness to write from a jail cell in Rome, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). The Christ of *all* authority and omnipotence is the Christ of omnipresence *all* the days of the mission era.

IV. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The question as to whether the Great Commission can be taught is difficult to answer. Yet there are several considerations based on a biblical injunction, on historical experience and on psychological implications that should motivate us to action in teaching that the Great Commission is binding for all times.

A. Light From the Bible

In the Old Testament God commanded his people, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:6), to which Christ adds, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39). It is very explicit that the "Great Commandment" (Mt 22:36) should be taught diligently to each generation. By analogy, the same injunction can be applied to the words of the Great Commission:

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your home, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (Deut. 6:7).

The value of the Great Commission lies in the very fact that the risen Lord expressed it in several forms before leaving this earth and that the Holy Spirit saw fit to record it in each of the Gospels and in Acts. This not only "witnesses to

its tradition in the early church," but it also "demonstrates its dynamic in the original movement of Christianity."⁴⁷

B. Lessons from History

The history of world mission provides us with the most enlightening record on the response of the church to the Great Commission. Whenever the church has responded in obedience both its life at home and its witness in the world showed dynamic signs of vitality and spirituality on the road of its pilgrimage. But the opposite is also true. A few examples must suffice to illustrate my point.

First, the apostolic church lived by the Great Commission. It may be argued, as Harry Boer shows,⁴⁸ that it was the dynamic of the Holy Spirit and not obedience to the Great Commission that motivated the early church to engage in world mission.

Whatever the motivating force may have been, three factors remain to be underscored.⁴⁹ One is the account each gospel writer gives of the Great Commission. This stands as a monumental witness to its dynamic tradition in the primitive church. The second factor is the presence of a dynamic missionary movement in the early church. This demonstrates the realization of the Great Commission at that time. The third thing is Paul's consciousness of having been sent to the Gentile nations for the purpose of bringing the Gospel to them. His method of discipling by preaching Christ crucified and risen, by baptizing or having baptized those who believe, and by teaching or discipling those baptized is clearly patterned after the Great Commission.

Second, the postapostolic church has "spelled out" the Great Commission under various circumstances, as the late Max Warren (1904-1978), director of the Church Mission Society, has put it. Warren makes reference to a pamphlet by Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952), "the apostle to Islam," on *The Patience of God in Moslem Evangelisation*. This pamphlet, Warren says, is one of his "more treasured possessions" because it helps him understand the response of the church to the Great Commission throughout history.

The patience of God—that surely is the only starting point for any theological understanding of the bitter-sweet story of how the Church in history has spelled-out and mis-spelled its great commission.⁵⁰

Yes, the church has, indeed, mis-spelled the Great Commission by omitting the first letter in the second word which spells “omission.” True, there has always been *Light in Dark Ages*, as Raymond Edman (1900-1967), former president of Wheaton College, has conclusively demonstrated. But some carried that light in the form of a barely glowing candle. Nonetheless, the Great Commission has always been taken seriously—if not by the church, then by individuals within the church in postapostolic and prereformation times.

Third, there was a renewed, dynamic interest in the Great Commission within the so-called “Radical Reformation” movement in the sixteenth century. With their emphasis on the Believers’ Church these Anabaptist or biblically radical Christians were simply gripped by the force of the Great Commission accounts found in the gospels. Franklin H. Littell, the Methodist scholar of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement quotes the Great Commission passages from an early Luther Bible and then comments:

No texts appear more frequently than the above in the confessions of faith and in court testimonies of the Anabaptists, and none show more clearly the degree to which Anabaptism was different in conviction and type from the intact and stable ways of magisterial Protestantism. The Anabaptists. . .believed that the Church of the Restitution, the True Church with its disciplined laymen. . .were forerunners of a time to come, in which the Lord would establish His people and His law throughout the earth.⁵²

The seriousness with which the Anabaptists approached the Great Commission is seen in the frequent commissioning services they held in barns, mills, forests, and caves. One of the songs sung at these services tells the story. From a rather long poem I have selected and translated a few verses:

As God His Son was sending
 Into this world of sin,
 His Son is now commanding
 That we this world should win.
 He sends us and commissions
 To preach the Gospel clear,
 To call upon all nations
 To listen and to hear.

To Thee, O God, we're praying,
 We're bent to do Thy will;
 Thy Word we are obeying,
 They glory we fulfill.
 All peoples we are telling
 To mend their sinful way,
 That they might cease rebelling,
 Lest judgment be their pay.

And if Thou, Lord, desire,
 And should it be Thy will
 That we taste sword and fire
 By those who thus would kill,
 Then comfort, pray, our loved ones
 And tell them, we've endured.
 And we shall see them yonder—
 Eternally secured.

Thy Word, O Lord, does teach us,
 And we do understand;
 Thy promises are with us
 Until the very end.
 Thou hast prepared a haven—
 Praised be Thy holy name.
 We laud Thee, God of heaven,
 Through Christ, our Lord. Amen!

The commissioning ceremony was observed by the entire congregation. In most cases the missionaries were married men, leaving wife and children behind; occasionally wives went with their husbands. In the event that the missionaries would be executed by "sword and fire," as expressed in the song, the Church was committed to take care of their widows and orphaned children.⁵³

Fourth, the era of renewal and pietism in Germany gave birth to a new thrust of world mission during the early part of the eighteenth century. Through the inspiration, vision, and motivation of men like Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1727) and Nikolaus Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) there emerged an unprecedented mission movement that took the Great Commission very seriously, literally carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth.

At the close of that century God used the British shoemaker William Carey (1761-1834) to place a burden upon many Christians for the unevangelized peoples around the world. Obedience to the Great Commission became a central concept for men and women throughout Protestant Europe and America. This new awareness of the Christian obligation to "make disciples of all nations" gave rise to countless Christian denominations and congregations, loosely structured groups and firmly organized associations that were committed to carry out the Lord's mandate.

C. Insight From Psychology

One of the psycho-linguistic principles applied in language learning is repetition. The old adage that "repetition is the mother of all wisdom" may not be infallible, but it certainly has proven its worth many times. Whenever a concept or an action is repeated frequently enough it becomes part of one's spontaneous behaviour pattern. Life becomes conditioned by the impact of repetition. This may well have been Christ's reason for repeating the Great Commission on various occasions in the presence of his followers. It registered. Their minds became conditioned. They all went into mission work, except James who died as a true witness before he left Jerusalem.

I have already alluded to the value of including the Great Commission in a confession of faith that is frequently repeated. G.W. Peters makes this pertinent observation on that point:

It would be well for the church to realize the psychological significance and add the Great Commission of our Lord to the Apostles' Creed which is confess-

ed every Sunday in numerous churches. This could have wholesome results in the lives of many believers, engraving in the hearts and minds of participants a direction of life as well as a commission and responsibility.⁵⁴

The same psychological principle is operative in the Lord's mandate to teach his commandments diligently to our children in the house and at work, in the morning and evening. It could become a rewarding practice if we as members of Christian families would take leave of each other with these words, "As you go, make disciples!"

CONCLUSION

It is often said that mission cannot be taught, it must be caught. That also applies to the Great Commission. True, one can teach many things *about* the Great Commission, but the Commission *itself* demands obedience, not information. Yet the merit in teaching and learning about the Great Commission lies not so much in information *per se* as in the inspiration and motivation derived from it.

As my Father has sent me, so I send you. As you go, make disciples of all peoples. Having gone, preach the gospel to all creation; for repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached in my name to all nations.

You will be witnesses unto me
to the ends of the earth
And I will abide with you
to the end of time.

The Great Commission is binding to the church of Jesus Christ and must be taught and lived diligently by creed and deed to every generation until Christ comes back.

NOTES

- 1 *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Hillsboro, Kansas: The Board of Christian Literature, 1976), p. 16.
- 2 In his three-volume collection and description of the *Creeeds of Christendom* (6th rev. ed., Grand Rapids, Baker reprint 1977), Philip Schaff (1819-1893) lists not one creed that explicitly speaks of the Great Commission. Of course, he has omitted the 1573 *Waldensian Confession* as well as the 1632 *Anabaptist Dordrecht Confession* both of which do speak of the Great Commission. Recently David Hubbard published a book, *What We Evangelicals Believe* (1979). This exposition of the Fuller Confession of Faith also deals with the Great Commission.
- 3 All Scripture quotations are from the 1962 A.J. Holman edition of the Revised Standard Version, unless noted otherwise.
- 4 *Confession of Faith* 1976, p. 16.
- 5 Dr. David Ewert, editor of this book, translated the passage for this publication upon request of the author.
- 6 Howard Loewen, "Hearing the Word: The Great Commission." *Direction* (April, 1978), p. 33.
- 7 Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 85-86.
- 8 Not all reliable early manuscripts contain Mark 16:9-20 where the part of the Great Commission is found. For an examination of the textual problem see D. Edmond Hiebert's commentary, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), pp. 412-422. Samuel M. Zwemer offers a rather lengthy explanation of the problem from the perspective of a missionary statesman: *Into All the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943), pp. 69-86.
- 9 Hiebert, *Mark*, p. 418.
- 10 J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Trans. by David H. Freeman (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), p. 12.
- 11 David M. Howard, *The Great Commission for Today* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1976), p. 17.

- 13 B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 294.
- 14 George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*. Sixth Printing (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 173.
- 15 Howard, *Great Commission*, p. 53.
- 16 Karl Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20" in *The Theology of Christian Mission*, edited by Gerald H. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), p. 57.
- 17 Barth, "Exegetical Study," pp. 58-59.
- 18 R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 276.
- 19 Howard, *Great Commission*, p. 54.
- 20 The German New Testament scholar, Adolf Schlatter (1852-1938) *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Stuttgart: Calw, 1953), p. 422 and the British Bible expositor R.V.G. Tasker (*Matthew*, p. 277), suggest the presence of the "five hundred Brethren." Barth ("Exegetical Study," p. 59) says that their presence "seems unlikely." An excellent essay on problems related to the various people involved in the account is Robert D. Culver's, "What is the Church's Commission? Some Exegetical Issues in Matthew 28:16-20" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (1968), pp. 239-253.
- 21 Barth, "Exegetical Study," p. 59.
- 22 Cf. B. Gärtner, "Distinguish, Doubt" *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Ed. by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), Vol. I, pp. 503-505.
- 23 Those interested in in-depth exegetical studies of the text may want to consult such works as: (a) Dennis Oliver's dissertation, "Make Disciples!" (Fuller Theological Seminary, 1974); (b) the critical exposition by Benjamin J. Hubbard, "The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20" (University of Iowa 1973); (c) Cleon Roger's essay on "The Great Commission," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130 (September 1973), pp. 258-267; (d) Ernst Lohmeyer's excellent study entitled "Mir ist gegeben alle Gewalt im Himmel und auf Erden! Eine Exegese

- von Mt. 28:16-20," *In Memoriam Ernst Lohmeyer*, edited by Werner Schmauch (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1951), pp. 22-49; and (e) the excellent articles by the renowned theologian Otto Michel, "Menschensohn und Völkerwelt," *Evangelische Missionszeitschrift* 2 (1941), pp. 257-267; and "Der Abschluss des Matthäusevangeliums," *Evangelische Theologie* 10 (1950), pp. 16-26.
- 24 Michel, "Menschensohn," pp. 161-162.
 - 25 Hubbard, "Matthean Redaction," provides numerous examples of ancient installation practices, usually comprising five rather than three distinct events, pp. 25-67.
 - 26 Archibald T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 831ff.
 - 27 Gustav Warneck, *Die evangelische Missionslehre* Vol IV: *Der Betrieb der Sendung*. Second edition (Gotha: Perthes, 1902), pp. 210-286.
 - 28 Barth, "Exegetical Study," p. 60.
 - 29 Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Revell, 1929), p. 321.
 - 30 Culver, "Exegetical Issues," p. 24.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, p. 244; cf. pp. 243-245.
 - 32 A few of the better known works on group conversion—which I prefer to call "multipersonal conversion"—are: Georg Vicedom, "An Example of Group Conversion," *Practical Anthropology* 9 (May-June 1962), pp. 123-130; Alan R. Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity* (London: Lutherworth, 1967); J. Waskom Pickett, et. al., *Church Growth and Group Conversion* (South Pasadena: William Carey, 1973); Christian Keysser, *Gottes Weg ins Hubeland* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1949); Don Richards, *Peace Child* (Third Ed. Glendale: Regal, 1976).
 - 33 Morgan, *Matthew*, p. 321.
 - 34 Barth, "Exegetical Study," p. 67.
 - 35 Fritz Rienecker, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1953), p. 378.
 - 36 Richard R. DeRidder, "The Great Commission," in A

- World To Win*, ed by Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 47.
- 37 Blauw, *Missionary Nature*, - 87.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 39 Quoted by Howard, *Great Commission*, p. 66.
- 40 Barth, "Exegetical Study," p. 64.
- 41 Patrick J. St. G. Johnstone, *Gebet für die Welt* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1978), p. 16.
- 42 Ralph D. Winter, "Penetrating the Last Frontiers." A Chart on the World in Missionary Perspective. U. S. Center for World Mission, 1605 E. Elizabeth St., Pasadena, CA 91104. Cf. Johnstone, *Gebet*, p. 16.
- 43 Blauw, *Missionary Nature*, p.86.
- 44 Warneck, *Missionslehre*, Vol. 4, p. 223.
- 45 Elmer A. Martens, "Summary of Messages at Canadian Conference, July, 1979." (Xeroxed notes on file), p. 3.
- 46 Peters, *Theology*, p. 189.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 48 For the argument for and against the impact of the Great Commission in the apostolic church see Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), particularly chapters 3-5; Warneck, *Missionslehre* Vol. I, passim.
- 49 Peters, *Theology*, p. 174.
- 50 Max Warren, *I Believe in the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 59.
- 51 See Edman's valuable book, *Light in Dark Ages* (Wheaton: Van Kampen, 1949).
- 52 Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 109. For an in-depth study of "The Great Commission in the Reformation" see my article by that title with the most important literature listed there. *Direction* (April, 1975), pp. 303-318.
- 53 Kasdorf, "Great Commission" *Direction* 1975, pp. 312-313.
- 54 Peters, *Theology*, pp. 177-178.

CHAPTER VIII

TEACHING NEIGHBOUR LOVE

Henry J. Schmidt

Ours is a generation of talkers and travellers. It has been suggested that an epitaph of modern man might read, "when all is said and done, much more will have been said than done." The church has been rightfully criticized for its failure to demonstrate the neighbour love which it so loudly proclaims. It is one thing to say, "I care," but it is quite another to involve oneself in caring relationships. It doesn't cost nearly as much to announce God's love to people as to be God's instrument in loving people personally.

The challenge of the church is to mirror God's love. God's love is committed to persons. It focuses on the welfare of the other person and "does not live unto itself." The tension in the church is to keep the perspective between receiving God's love graciously and sharing that love with a world unselfishly. A living church must continuously experience and appreciate God's love. It must continue to rejoice over the fact that it has been "chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world." But it can never forget why it has been chosen. "For the love of Christ leaves us no choice. . . his purpose in dying for all was that men, while still in life, should cease to live; unto themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life" (II Cor. 5:14-15). The question "am I my brother's keeper?" becomes an affirmation, I am responsible to God and to my brother. The question, "Who is my neighbour?" is quickly translated from the theoretical realm to practical reality where commitment to God can never be divorced from commitment to humanity. The Great Commission, "To love the

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, . . . and your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39), is vitally linked to the Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

In teaching neighbour love the Seminary is really focusing on the mission of the church. It is a reminder to the people of God of their high calling in the world. It calls his people to maturity, to a "giving love", to a dynamic relationship that reaches out to people.

The church's model for sharing neighbour love in a loveless world is Jesus Christ. Jesus came as an expression and clarification of God's love. He said, "He that has seen me has seen the father" (John 20:21). The role of the people of God under His spirit, is the work of continuing incarnation—of making God's love and life visible in everyday life. In the *Presence of the Kingdom* Jacques Ellul states that the three most potent metaphors Jesus used to describe the work of his followers in society are: "ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13); "you are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14); you are sent forth as sheep among wolves (Matt. 10:16).¹ I would add a fourth metaphor from Jesus final commission, "You shall be witnesses unto me. . ." (Acts 1:8). Salt, light, witness, sheep among wolves all relate to the mission of sharing neighbour love in society. Jesus also said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another" (John 13:34-35).

There are several questions which naturally arise from these texts which impact leadership models and Seminary training:

1) What is the nature and meaning of the neighbour love which the church shares in the world? 2) why is neighbour love so vital to the church's impact in society? and 3) what are the practical implications of neighbour love in evangelism?

I. THE NATURE OF NEIGHBOUR LOVE

God's commitment to the human race can hardly be disputed. Throughout the Bible God's love is revealed through the redemption of His people. When man chose to disobey God's clear command in the garden, God was the initiator in restoring the broken relationship (Gen. 3:1-15). Genesis 12:1-2 records that "the Lord said to Abraham go forth from your country. . . I will bless you and you shall be a blessing." God gave Abraham a gift—the promise of His blessing. But the promise was coupled with a summons to "be a blessing." Israel as a covenant people began to rest in the promise, but forgot their calling "to be a kingdom of priests" and a "light to the Gentiles" (Ex. 19:3-9). Israel forgot that God only called a special people for a special purpose—for missions.² Through the prophets God calls his people to renew their covenant, to turn from their idolatry, to worship and serve Yahweh alone. Throughout scripture God gave repeated verbal declarations of his unchanging love for his people (Is. 43:4; Jer. 31:3; Micah 1:2). Throughout the history of his people God reveals a healthy balance between love and discipline, mercy and judgment. The Egyptian bondage, the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, the material provisions in the wilderness, the clear revelation in the 10 commandments, Israel's subservience to heathen countries and the deliverance through the judges, the Babylonian captivity and the restoration to the land all focus on God's relationship to his people.

With the birth of Jesus John reminds his readers that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The invitation is clear. "As many as received him to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). In his instruction to his disciples Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). It is only in obedience to Christ that relationships are altered and character is molded. Paul likewise reminds the Corinthians that their new role in society is one of ambassadorship because "God was in Christ, reconciling

the world to himself, not counting men's trespasses against them and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:19).

To teach neighbour love in a world that desperately wants love must begin with a commitment to God. The Christian world view is God-centered. It accepts God's revelation in creation, scripture, in the history of His people and in Jesus Christ. However, awareness of God's love through revelation apart from a restored relationship, short-circuits genuine neighbour love. The Ten Commandments begin with the words, "I am the Lord your God," and proceed to condemn idolatry and to affirm Yahweh as the one who alone is worthy of man's deepest love (Ex. 20:105). Jesus' summation of the Great Commission (Matt. 22:37-39) is a call to love God supremely. It is a summons to cut the cord of self-centered existence. It calls man to shift the center of gravity in life from self to God. To obey the Great Commandment is to admit the depth of sin's guilt and the grip of man's perennial problem of "self-o-holicism." To love God supremely is to face honestly one's own spiritual, psychological, sociological and ecological alienation. This in turn gives one a perspective on humanity. Paul reminds his readers that man's alienation has been dealt with in Jesus Christ, "for he is our peace. . ." (Eph. 2:11-15). When man is reconciled to God through repentance and faith in Christ, his life comes under new management and becomes an instrument of God's love in the world. "The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22). John says, "Herein is love, not that we loved him but that he first loved us" (I Jn. 4:11). Jesus described the life of the believer in these terms, "He that believes on me as the scripture has said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of life producing water" (Jn. 7:37). The neighbour love we share with others is an outgrowth of our love relationship with God.

It is important to understand the nature of God's love which he manifested in Jesus since we are sent into the world to love others as he loved us. Ancient Greeks expressed their levels of love by three different words: 1) eros love, which is a getting love. It is ego centered, possessive, lustful. 2) phileo love, which is a give-and-take love. It is

more mature than eros because it accepts some responsibility to give. However, it is limited because each person wants the right to determine his level of give-and-take love; and 3) agape love which is a godly, unconditional, affirming love. Paul describes it in these words, "But God demonstrated his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Wilhard Becker defines agape love in these words:

The ability to love is the ability to look away from oneself to another person or thing. . . . Genuine love always has in it something of the nature of God's love. It is selfless and constant. It does not want to have, but to give. It does not want to become happy but to make happy. Its greatest joy is in the development of the other, the loved one. It is not dependent on counter love nor bound to its ego.³

"Love never ends" (I Cor. 13:8). True love is eternal because it comes from the Eternal. This love can unfold itself most purely in our relationship to God. He is its origin, and here we can best receive it and let it take on form within us.

To know and experience God's unconditional love revamps one's self image. It brings a new freedom, affirmation and authenticity in expressing love in all relationships. Jesus never came to destroy personhood but to enhance it. His speciality is not carbon copies or stuffy molds. To Jesus every person is unique and important. However, creativity, uniqueness and personality have all been impacted by sin. This is why a response to God's love frees a person to be honest about his sin, his need of forgiveness, his strengths and weaknesses. Jesus said the commandment is "to love our neighbours as we love ourselves." A forgiven person who is at peace with God and with himself is free from the slavery of competing with others for acceptance, of being threatened by others who are more gifted, of needing to dominate every situation because of basic insecurity, of needing to "make it" in relationships. The love relationship with God drastically impacts self-image. It is liberating to know that in Christ we are loved for who we are; not for what we do. We are accepted because of his grace not

because of our earned merit badges. In an age when there are 30,000 religions offering self-improvement, God promises to re-shape our self-image through a reconciled relationship with himself.

It is impossible to share genuine neighbour love when one is at war with oneself. While it is true that God calls every person to self-denial and self-emptying, real faith does not destroy personhood or selfhood. Real Christian faith is always self-affirming, not self-mutilating. The true Christian who "loves others as he loves himself" does not try to get rid of self or kill his will, rather he willfully determines to do the will of the Father. When Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ," he was not describing some introspective psychological process by which he reduced his ego to a zero, rather he was saying in effect, "I determine to give up my own rights just as Jesus did; I decided not merely to accumulate the benefits Christ has provided, but to follow his model in sharing the world."⁴ To love God is to receive his forgiveness, to face oneself honestly and with self-acceptance as a new creation in Christ. It stretches our capacity to accept others where they are because God has accepted us in Christ and subsequently we can accept ourselves. It is God's love flowing through a transformed life that impacts the world.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF NEIGHBOUR LOVE

Life must manifest itself. Wherever life is present under normal conditions it must act. Moreover, all life of every kind expresses itself according to its nature. Physical life expresses itself physically; mental life mentally; and spiritual life spiritually. If the life and love of Christ is in a person, it expresses itself. "God is love" (I Jn. 1:8). Love lies at the heart of God's nature and is the normal expression of every outgoing of his being toward others. John says that it is irreconcilable to profess to love God but to hate mankind (I Jn. 4:20). Love is the spontaneous outgoing of one's whole life and being in behalf of others. The Bible gives at least three reasons why neighbour love is inseparably related to love for God.

A. Love Authenticates the Good News

In John 13:13-35 Jesus gives a new commandment to his disciples "to love one another as I have loved you," and then he adds, "by this shall all men know ye are my disciples." Francis Schaeffer suggests that love is to be "the mark of the Christian in every era."⁵ Love is the authenticating sign that makes Christianity a visible reality and a viable option in a loveless world. When Jesus gave the new commandment, he underscores at least two things: 1) there is to be special kind of demonstration of love among Christians within the church, and 2) there is to be a quality of love which finds its parallel in the life of Jesus Christ. The church is to be a loving church in a dying culture. Jesus gave the world the authority to judge whether you and I are born again Christians by our observable love toward other Christians. In other words, Jesus gives the world a piece of litmus paper, a reasonable thermometer; if there is not observable love, the world may conclude that we are not Christians. Jesus re-echoes this message in John 17:21 when he prays, "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Jesus is stating that we cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus claims are true, that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.

The greatest compliment given to the early church was, "look at how they love one another." A study of the Pauline epistles likewise reveals a heavy emphasis on building love relationships, maintaining unity, resolving internal tensions, bearing one another's burdens (I Cor. 1:10; 3:1; 3:8; Gal. 5:13-15; Eph. 4:1-10; Phil. 2:1-5; Col. 3:14; Philemon 3). Paul's burden was that God's people become a loving body so that the Gospel message could be demonstrated and understood in a pagan world. Paul was well aware of the fact that dissension and disunity are the "kiss of death" on the best evangelistic rhetoric. A message that is not undergirded by a corporate community manifesting changed attitudes and behavior has a hollow ring. This is not to suggest that the church will ever demonstrate love as perfectly

and selflessly as Jesus did, but it implies a willingness to admit error, to practice forgiveness and to impliment reconciliation so that love is visible.

B. Love Reflects the Believer's Commitment to Obedience

Neighbour love not only authenticates the good news, but it reflects the believers commitment to Lordship. A modern day parallel to the lawyers question to Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" might we be, "why should I love my neighbour when I don't feel like it?" Love is an emotion, but it is also a command. Is this a contradiction? No, the greatest commandment calls us to love God above all else. The new commandment Jesus gave his disciples was "to love one another as I have loved you." Love is not only a feeling, it is a choice. We choose to love or not to love.

Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount with a penetrating statement: "Not everyone who calls me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father," (Matt. 7:21). Jesus complimented the religious Jews for their diligence in searching the scripture, but then chides them for their refusal to obey the obvious testimony of scripture and to come to Him for life (Jn. 5:39). The neighbour love Jesus proclaimed and modelled was never rooted solely in feelings. Agape love moves beyond feelings, the worthiness of the object, or human responsiveness. It springs from its selfless character and from deliberate choice. For example, Jesus' response to the insults, harsh treatment and abuse at the crucifixion was, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." It wasn't that there were no other options open to him. But his choice demonstrated the depth of his love for the human race. His counsel in life was never, "Feel you way into a new way of acting," but he called for obedience and in essence said, "Do what is right, follow God's Word, act your way into a new way of feeling."

Such neighbour love may appear weak and enemic, but it is a deliberate strategy. A willingness to love others as Christ has loved me, to love my neighbour as I love myself and to love my enemies is a commentary on Christ's Lordship in life. The commitment to love God supremely binds

one to a commitment to love persons regardless of their race, value system, status, vocation, or location. Neighbour love is important because it is a mark of personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord.

C. Love Extends God's Kingdom

Love is the most powerful force in the whole world. Napoleon once said, "There is only one way not to be won over by love and that is to flee from it." In commenting on mental disorders Karl Menninger has said that love is the key to the entire therapeutic program of the modern psychiatric hospital. In his book, *Why Am I Afraid to Love?*, John Powell states, "Our lives are shaped by those who love us and by those who refuse to love us."⁶ Even the late agnostic philosopher Bertrand Russell confesses in his autobiography that his life has been governed by three passions: 1) a hunger for his love; 2) a hunger for his knowledge, and 3) a pity for the suffering of mankind.

In an age when man, as a restless and searching creature, finds new cures, new commodities and new comforts, love is still the indispensable ingredient. Individuals can still best experience and understand God's love through honest modeling in the church. It was the honest caring love of Jesus that was the great attraction in his ministry. A frequent description of Jesus by the Gospel writers is, "he was moved with compassion" (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; Mark. 1:41; 6:34; Matt. 20:34; Luke 7:13). Paul says, "The love of Christ compels us" (II Cor. 5:14). In writing to the Thessalonians Paul commends them for becoming "a model for all believers in Macedonia and Achaia," so that no word was necessary to describe how they had turned from idols to the true God (I Thess. 1:7-10). Their impact was based on an active faith, a labor of love and a patient hope (I Thess. 1:3).

It is important to remember that whatever else man is searching for at any given point in history, the rediscovery of love is always the best treasure to be found. Most men and women are not looking for religion, nor do they perceive themselves to be sinners in need for forgiveness. But most people are looking for love. People may not be arrested by arguments, logic, doctrine or denominational distinctives,

but genuine love is irresistible. When God's love fills his people the light always shines the brightest because the gospel rings true.

III. THE PRACTICAL EXPRESSION OF NEIGHBOUR LOVE

"Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God is love (I Jan. 4:7, 8). Neighbour love must have a Divine Source. It is rooted in God, revealed most clearly in the life and death of Jesus, and expressed in man's reconciled relationship with the Father. Jesus is our model in sharing neighbour love. The question is how does his way of relating to people effect my sharing neighbour love in my world? If Jesus is the model for missions in society, what practical principles are transferable? This section will highlight five principles from Jesus' life which impact personal and corporate evangelism. These five principles are central in teaching neighbour love at the Seminary.

A. Jesus' Neighbour Love was a Lifestyle

In reporting Jesus' ministry Luke writes, "In the first part of my works, O Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus *did* and *taught*..." (Acts 1:1). Luke 4:18-19 records the customary visit of Jesus to the Nazareth synagogue on the sabbath, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Proclamation of good news in Jesus' life was directly linked with a demonstration of that good news. David Watson notes that "Jesus was sent by His father into the world not merely to conduct a preaching tour, but to show the reality of the living God in a way that powerfully met the needs of people."⁷ Jesus becomes a model in evangelism and sharing neighbour love by his consistent combination of being, doing and telling in his life. His total life was an interpretation of God's good news and his message impacted the total person.

Myron Augsburger defines evangelism as "letting people know and persuading them to accept the Gospel."⁸ Augsburger goes on to elaborate on the three strands of New Testament evangelism which characterized both Jesus' life and the ministry of the early church: 1) *koinonia*—the witness of fellowship. God's people are loving people. Love is the natural and normal expression of their life with God and one another. Jesus was a "friend of sinners" (Mark. 2:16). The early church expressed their love through a close knit fellowship where spiritual, material and social needs were shared; 2) *diakonia*—the witness of service. Jesus reached out to people through loving actions. He healed the sick, raised the dead, fed the hungry, cast out evil spirits (Mark 1:21-45). In Acts 3 Peter and John healed the man at the beautiful gate of the temple. Acts 6 records the selection of the first deacons because the Greek widows were being neglected; and 3) *kerygma*—the witness of proclamation. "Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God" (Mark 1:14). In the midst of the persecution, imprisonment and flogging, Acts 5 states that the apostles "went on steadily with their teaching in the temple and in private homes, proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Messiah" (Acts 5:42).

Being, doing and telling are inseparable expressions of love. Neighbour love must become a lifestyle in the 20th century church as it was with Jesus. Neighbour love cannot polarize preaching the gospel and social action. Jesus Christ was one hundred percent for both and his church cannot be committed to less. When the imprisoned John the Baptist asked for confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus never gave him another sermon. He said, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:19-22). Jesus' neighbour love was a ministry to the total person. His love touched them at their point of need, whether it was physical spiritual or emotional.

B. Jesus' Neighbour Love was Unconditional and Constant

God's love encircles the globe. In Luke 15 Jesus told the story of the forgiving father who welcomed his son home.

Though the prodigal had strayed in a far away country, he had never ceased to be the object of His fathers love. God's love has no limits. He is without respect of persons. He hurts when people hurt. Jesus demonstrated how constant God's love really is both through his life and in his death. God does not back off when man sins—He calls us to repentance—to admit who we are and where we are. Because he loves unconditionally he calls to new starts. This does not mean that love does not call for a response. Genuine love must be received to be experienced since love involves relationships. However, the selfless quality of that love is never affected by the response. When the rich young ruler failed to answer Christ's challenge to discipleship, Jesus did not love him any less. However, the rich young ruler left Christ's presence that day without making the personal application of God's love in his life. Jesus' story of the good Samaritan and his encounter with the Samaritan woman are not "rigged stories." They are live illustrations that his love knew no racial, social, cultural or religious limits. The question which was posed to a pastor by his neighbour friend is worth pondering, "Will you (pastor) still love me and be my friend even if I don't accept your Jesus?" Neighbour love must continue in spite of response.

To love constantly and unconditionally requires something more than human resources can supply. Human love always has its limits. It draws little circles which include some and exclude others. It becomes so conditional. At times human love says, "I will love you if. . .if you are good, if you eat your dinner, if you don't make a mess, if you work hard, if you never take advantage of me, if you call for help when it suits me? At other times, human love says I love you because. . .because you're a winner, because your grandparents are proud of you, because you make good grades in school, because you agree with my point of view. But to share neighbour love as Jesus did is to move beyond the conditional "ifs" and "because" to the unconditional "anyhow." It is to say in effect, do what you want to and I will love you anyway, put me on a cross, hit me, refuse to listen to me, crucify me, I'll love you anyway. That quality of love in relationships can only come because "God's love that has been shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom 5:5). God's

love moves one beyond mere reaction in like kind. It continues to reach even when communication is cut off.

Jesus was both global and personal in his demonstration of love. Whether it is bearing witness to those outside of Christ, or assimilating new believers into the local church fellowship, neighbour love must be more expansive and inclusive. Neighbour love cannot lock some individuals, races, cultures, peoples in and leave others out in the cold. Assimilation of new believers is one of the biggest problems facing the evangelical church today and is its own commentary on our conditional love. Augsburg writes, "New believers must have a sense of being wanted, not as an expression of sugar-coated, condescending love, but in a true awareness that they are among brethren, redeemed sinners with whom they have this essential characteristic in common."⁹

C. Jesus' Neighbour Love was Creative

Love is the basic expression of life and the bridge in human relationships. When man did his worst, God did his best. God paid a debt that he didn't owe because man owed a debt that he could never pay. Paul says, "While we were dead in our trespasses and sins," God built a bridge to the human race through the death of His son. In his relationship with people Jesus demonstrates vulnerability, visibility and creativity. He "pitched his tent along side of us." He became fully human. Hebrews reminds us that "he learned obedience as a man" (Heb. 5:9). In his relationship with people he was not stereo-typed. He was not a "one-liner." His approach to different people reflected an awareness of people's individuality, needs, context and background. With the woman at the well he discussed her need for "living water" (John 4:10-14). To the rich young ruler Jesus said, "Sell what you have, give to the poor and come follow me, then you will have treasure in heaven" (Luke 18:22). After dismissing her accusers Jesus turned to the woman caught in adultery and said, "Neither do I condemn you, go your way and sin no more" (John 8:11). To the religious, morally upright, politically astute Pharisee Nicodemus, Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3:3). In calling Nathaniel

as a disciple Jesus commended him saying, "Here is an Israelite worthy of the name, there is nothing false in him" (Jn. 1:47). The encounters illustrate Jesus' ability to be flexible and creative in his relationships with people.

One of the saddest commentaries on much current evangelism is that it is tied to sterile methodology and plastic relationships. The fact that an unconverted person is cynical enough to ask, "What is going on? You are the eighth person who has talked to me with the same grin, the same lines, and in the same style" is its own commentary on our lack of creativity. We must learn to "scratch where people itch." Ralph Neighbour suggests that everyone has a "hole in their heart" and evangelism is sensitively sharing Christ as an answer to that existing need. This implies that like Jesus we must learn to be "a friend of sinners." There is a desperate need today for ordinary Christians to articulate a Christian world-view in non-religious language.

An anthropologist once said, "People differ widely but not wildly." Divorces have common needs and an evangelistic cell group can be found to discuss them. Parents of retarded children have needs that can be met by a fellowship formed especially for that purpose. Teenagers who ride motorcycles could be reached by a Christian mechanic who would be willing to open his garage one night a week for a course in repairs and Bible study. Immigrants or foreign students need to learn English. The growing number of high rise apartment dwellers, who are increasingly detached from any church, also have spiritual needs. The opportunities are limitless but God needs sensitive, dedicated and creative people to share His message.

It has been suggested that the gospel is like an electric current. It flows best when there is live contact. The message has not changed but our approach to people in a pluralistic society demands every ounce of commitment, sensitivity and creativity God can give us.

D. Jesus' Neighbour Love Looked Beyond the Issue to the Person

Urie Bender laments that fact one of the results of secularization is depersonalization. He writes,

Men and women are social security numbers: digits, stick figures, face in hazy outline. They are a political mass to be manipulated. They are a market to be exploited; bodies to be clothed, stomachs to be fed. They are a housing development to be managed. They are an employee group to be used. They are a classroom to be taught. They are an audience to be preached to. But seldom are the individuals—persons with individual characteristics, special needs, private hopes and aspirations. Our world has taken the person out of persons.¹⁰

True neighbour love has the capacity to look beyond the issue to the person. This is not easy because while Christians stand against sin in society, they also stand with Christ for people. It is too easy to let people's sins, habits, value systems, life-styles limit our love and relationships. We fear contamination. We fear judgment from the church crowd. We don't know how to handle people's sins, so we give up and write them off. We seldom see past the issue to ask what makes people live the way they do?

When God looked down on the human race and saw what was going on He had every right to say, "I'm through—I give up." But grace and mercy meant that He looked beyond the issue to the person. Jesus demonstrated this same capacity. From the Gospel accounts it is evident that Jesus did not see people first of all as tax collectors, uncouth fishermen, prostitutes, or Pharisees. But he saw them as persons, as sheep without a shepherd—as persons who need love and forgiveness in their life. The Pharisees on the other hand saw only the issues. They cared little for the person. They knew the law well and stood ready to stone the adulterous woman. Is it surprising that the people were not attracted to the Pharisees? But they flocked to Jesus. Why? He cared about the person. To love and accept people where they are does not condone their life-style or place a stamp of approval upon their sin. It is love that gives people the capacity to change. Like Jesus, we must not leave people in their sins, but we must interpret and model a better alternative—God's way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

E. Jesus' Neighbour Love was More Dialogue Than Monologue

Human nature finds it easier to talk than to listen. Paul Tournier talks about "the dialogue of the deaf" where no one really listens. One of the great tragedies of the modern age is that man can hear so well electronically, but he is so deaf to the needs and suffering of people all around. Our innate tendency as Christians is to rush in with the gospel message before we have determined the point or area at which the "good news" would get a fair hearing.

A study of Jesus' thirty-eight personal encounters recorded in the Gospels reveals that He was a master at dialogue rather than monologue. It is fascinating to notice how Jesus used questions and counter-questions in conversation. Jesus let people articulate their own needs without doing it for them (i.e. the woman at the well in John 4, "Go call thy husband," or blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:51, Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Master," the blind man answered, "That I might receive my sight" or the lawyer in Matthew 22, "Who is my neighbour," and Jesus responded with the story of the good Samaritan. Os Guinness suggests that the problem today is not only that the church is not giving answers, but it is not asking disturbing questions. He suggests that a pre-requisite for sharing neighbour love is a willingness to listen to people to determine their presuppositions about life, to expose the barrenness of their assumptions, and to introduce them to Jesus Christ. This can never be done on totally neutral ground because every person has some assumptions. However, it can be done on the common ground of man's search for reality, meaning and hope, which is a natural pursuit.

This implies that methodology must become second nature to us. We share neighbour love as people to people. It must be deeply human and ring true. We address issues such as the problem of evil, the nature of man, the problem of alienation and loneliness, the nature of truth, or man's "will to meaning", or death from a Christian world view. But it always means that we must earn the right to be

heard. It means being a real friend and developing a relationship where we listen before we talk. After listening lovingly, sensitively and discerningly the message can be directed to specific needs or areas of struggle.

CONCLUSION

Dr. E.M. Blaiklock of the University of Auckland in New Zealand says that of all the centuries the 20th century is most like the first both in terms of paganism and opportunity for sharing the Gospel. The impact of the 20th century church is directly related to the demonstration of God's love in day to day relationships. To obey the Great Commandment means total reorientation. The shift is from self-centeredness to Christ centeredness. The focus moves from being turned inward to living for others. The neighbour love we share in society comes from a Divine source. It authenticates our message, reflects our obedience and extends God's kingdom. People who have experienced God have become contagious people and congregations. Neighbour love becomes a lifestyle. It is the normal and natural expression of God's love in us where we live, worship, work or play. The church that shares true neighbour love lives with a sense of mission. It is never out of date or out of work. It lives in the constant realization that redemption and "living unto itself" are incompatible. To love God with heart, soul and mind is to become a "friend of sinners." It means we become deeply involved in being "good news" where people hurt, weep, bleed and die. The Seminary is committed to teaching and modelling this kind of neighbour love in training of leaders.

NOTES

- 1 Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), pp. 9-11.
- 2 Findley Edge, *The Greening of the Church*, (Waco: Word Books, 1971), pp. 32-47.
- 3 Wilhard Becker, *Love in Action*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), pp. 18-19.
- 4 Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King*, (Downer's Grove, Intervarsity Press, 1970), pp. 133-153.
- 5 Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Downer's Grove, Intervarsity Press, 1970), pp. 133-153.
- 6 John Powell, *Why Am I Afraid to Love*, (Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications Co., 1972), p. 71.
- 7 David Watson, *I Believe in Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), p. 27.
- 8 Myron Augsburger, *Invitation to Discipleship*, (Scottsdale, Herald Press, 1964), pp. 9-12, 33-42.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 10 Urie Bender, *The Witness*, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1965), p. 34.

CHAPTER IX

TEACHING STEWARDSHIP

Henry H. Dueck

Stewardship is not a popular topic today. It never has been. Whenever the word is mentioned we think of parting with our possessions. Although sometimes we are challenged to extend our horizons also to include our time and our talents. Our understanding of Scriptural teachings on this subject is limited and faulty at best. Nevertheless, we must discover what the Bible has to say to us about stewardship.

Stewardship is a difficult word to define in Christian terminology. Etymologically it is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "stye-ward" which describes an enclosure for live-stock.¹ The root meaning of the Greek word "*oikonomos*" literally means to be a manager of a house. Stewardship usually involves three concepts: a responsible servant, a specific trust and a final accounting.² When applied to the Christian life, this means that God entrusted all that He had to man; man in turn is responsible for this trust and must account for the way in which he has managed it. Although the term stewardship is used in a variety of ways, the meaning of the Greek word, to manage a household, is basic.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One of the underlying problems in understanding the concept of stewardship is our failure to see the development of the concept in Scripture. We need to trace the original application of the term in the Old Testament and then contrast it with the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament.

A. Stewardship in the Light of Creation

The creation account places man in a special relationship to God and to the rest of the created world.³ Man was created in the image of God, and is uniquely different from any other creature (Gen. 1:26-31). Obviously God had something special in mind when He carried out this act. Creation was followed by entrusting man with the responsibility to be fruitful and multiply; to fill the earth and subdue it; to rule over the fish in the sea; to rule over the birds in the sky and over every other living thing on earth. In the act of creation God has laid down several basic principles:

1. *The principle of divine ownership.* He has created the earth and everything in it. Therefore everything belongs to Him (Ex. 19:5; Psalm 50:10).

2. *The principle of delegated trust.* Man has been entrusted with the responsibility to manage the affairs of God on earth (Gen. 1:28-29). Nowhere does one read that this divine trust has been given to anyone else; nor does one have any reference to the limitations of the scope of this delegated trust.

3. *The principle of choice.* At the time of creation, God gave Adam the option to name the animals; God endorsed Adam by accepting his choices (Gen. 2:19). God also gave man the choice of obedience or disobedience to His divine command (Gen. 2:15). Man was given the right to act as a free moral agent in making his choice, based on his knowledge, insights, experiences and inclinations.

4. *The principle of accountability.* After the first choice was made, God held man accountable for the decision he made (Gen. 3:11-19). Adam and Eve had to hear the Lord's pronouncement of the consequences of their decision and action.

5. *The principle of divine grace.* In spite of man's disobedience, God's grace was made evident in finding a way to reconcile fallen man to Himself again (Gen. 3:15). Jesus brings into sharp focus for us that He has come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) in fulfillment of God's plan of redemption. Man is unique and therefore the object of His special love and grace.

B. Stewardship Before Moses

Cain and Abel give us the first example of an enlarged expression of stewardship. If its essence is expressed in management this would imply the wise use of the earth's resources entrusted to them. It would include wise investments and also keeping resources as a trust. For Cain and Abel, it also became an expression of worship to God by bringing Him an offering (Gen. 4:3-5). This was followed by the erection of altars with corresponding sacrifices by Noah (Genesis 8:20), Abraham (Genesis 12:7, 8), Isaac (Gen. 26:25) and Jacob (Gen. 33:20). A study of other nations of that era indicates that these practises were also common among them. Abraham provides us with the first instance of giving one-tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek, one of the many kings in Canaan (Gen. 14:18-20). It should be noted that Melchizedek combined both the office of king and priest of Salem in one person. According to the writer of Hebrews, Abraham recognized him as a priest. Later, Jacob vowed to God at Bethel, that he would give the Lord one-tenth of all his grain.

No one knows exactly how he arrived at the concept of one-tenth, but it is believed that early man computed all his measurements by using members of his body, e.g. fingers. It is interesting to find that the payment of 10% was a common custom for the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Lybians, Babylonians, Greeks, Hebrews and Romans of that period. Even though it was a common custom used by nations separated by thousands of miles, it was not a universal law. It was not, however, limited to Old Testament generations exclusively, as is sometimes thought to be the case.

C. Tithing Under Mosaic Legislation

The Hebrew farmer was required to tithe all agricultural products of the land as well as his livestock (Lev. 27:30-32). In order to ensure that no inferior animals were selected for the tithe, all animals had to pass by the owner, who counted out every tenth one for the Lord.

The tithes were to be paid to the Levites (Num. 18:21ff.). Because of the nature of their service and their functions,

the Levites did not have any other form of income and livelihood. In return for their service in the tabernacle they were to receive one-tenth of the income of Israel. Later, they were required to remit one-tenth of the tithe to the priests for their support (Num. 18:26).

The tithe had to be brought to the sanctuary in Jerusalem (Deut. 12:5ff.). If a man's village was too far away from Jerusalem, he could always take the tithe in the form of money. Every third year a man had to offer his tithe in his own locality, but even after that he was still compelled to make a trip to Jerusalem to worship (Deut. 26:12ff.). These relatively simple tithing laws tended to become ritualistic and legalistic, so that the spiritual worship aspect of tithing was lost among many.⁵ It is no wonder that the prophets and Jesus constantly had to remind their hearers, that favour with the Lord could not be merited on the basis of carrying out legalistic tithing procedures without submitting to the moral law of justice, mercy and faith (Matt. 23:23f.).

D. Tithing In Judaism

The Hebrew practises of offerings, vows, first fruits, tithes and poll taxes were carried out in Judaism in varying degrees until the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. During the second century B.C., the payment of tithes was neglected largely due to the dishonesty of people in collecting them. High priests were at times unscrupulous and grasping.

Tithing was not always a successful operation. People often thought of it as a legal requirement, but no one ever developed proper administrative machinery to enforce it. However, the practice of tithing kept the consciousness in the minds of men alive, that they owed something to God, even though it often represented but an elementary and crude understanding of their responsibility to their Creator.

E. Jesus' Teaching on Stewardship

With the coming of Christ a new concept of the relationship between a man and his possessions came to light: Jesus

did not so much promote the concept of tithing, as understood within the Law, but emphasized the concept of stewardship originally established by God in the Garden of Eden.

Formerly, the relationship of man to God was something like that of a tenant: he was obligated to pay a part of his property into the Lord's treasury. This is not stewardship as initially set out by God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28). Jesus now drew a different set of pictures by means of His parabolic method of teaching, while still upholding the Old Testament principles.

The term steward is never used in the Old Testament to express the relationship of a man to his property. In the Gospels, both the term and the expression are used as illustrated by various parables of Jesus. It then becomes important for us to outline the distinction between a tenant and a steward.

A tenant is one who uses the property of another person and who pays a prearranged rental fee for the use of it. No particular relationship exists between the tenant and the renter; nor is any particular relationship implied between the tenant and the property. When the transaction is completed each is free to follow his personal pursuits and the relationship is discontinued.

A steward is one who manages and administers the property for the owner. It becomes his expressed goal to accomplish the owner's desire who has entrusted the property to the manager. There is no form of ownership of the property or pretense of it by the manager. This establishes a much more responsible relationship than that of a tenant. It calls for keen exercise of intelligence to achieve another person's will. Nor is this a relationship for a stated period of time as in the case of a tenant, or a term appointment; it is for life, providing he is faithful to his master's trust.

Jesus' teaching about a steward implies that the personality of the latter merges with that of his master. The satisfactions, joys and rewards of life arise out of that service; consequently self-seeking and self-interest must be left behind.

This ideal exemplified by Christ is the ideal of the Christian life. The New Testament places great emphasis on the

importance of man as a human being with great value in the eyes of God. In response to God's love for him the Christian must find himself in surrender to God. The Christian is not a tenant on earth. He does not free himself from all obligations to the Lord by simply paying a part to God and then feeling that the rest is his own to be used at his discretion. The believer was purchased by the blood of Christ on Calvary and consequently belongs to the Lord. All of his possessions, time, talents and opportunities also belong to the Lord. He is never freed from servitude to Christ; nor would he want to be freed. His highest joy is derived in the consciousness of this surrender to God.

In the Parable of the Talents (Mat. 25:14-30) Jesus clarifies the relationship of the steward to his master more fully. Each servant is totally free to invest the sum of money entrusted to him as he deemed advisable: the master has full confidence in him. He is free to act on his own initiative, ingenuity and resourcefulness. Upon the master's return he is obliged to give a report of his activities. Jesus' teaching becomes clear when he rewards faithfulness with increased trust, dependability with greater responsibility. This is the picture of the Christian life and responsibility; the believer and his possessions belong entirely to Christ. The Christian is free to act within the limit of his personal resources, but stands under the directing will of God.

In the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27) each servant is given the same amount of money. Each was free to invest it as he deemed advisable and then to account for his actions. The elements of stewardship which become clear are faithfulness, responsibility, initiative and accountability. To everyone who had an increase, more responsibility was given; if no increase was evident on the entrusted amount, the original amount was taken away. The basic principle involved is that the smallest gift must be put to use. In Christian life a person does not stand still. He uses his gifts and makes progress or he loses what he has, even his own life.

In the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13), Jesus commends the man for his forethought and action in a critical personal situation. From the comments of Jesus following the parable, He brings into sharp focus the true

test of stewardship: the test of a person is faithfulness (v. 10); possessions are a means of testing a person's faithfulness (v. 11); what we possess belongs to God (v. 12). Ownership is vested in God; man is his steward or manager.

The Parable of the Faithful Servant (Luke 12:42-48) underscores Jesus' teaching on stewardship. The servant has full responsibility over the master's estate in his absence. The master may return at any time, so that constant preparedness is required. Faithfulness in stewardship leads to more responsibility; unfaithfulness is followed by punishment and ruin. Greater responsibilities are expected of those who have had the benefit of greater privileges and opportunities. The underlying concept again is that man and his wealth belong to God.

Many other quotations could be taken from the ministry of Christ to illustrate this teaching on stewardship. It must be noted that Jesus does not express a condemnation of wealth; it is not evil in itself. He did warn against the seductive dangers of riches whereby it is too easy to substitute trust in God for trust in personal power and possessions as expressed by wealth. Jesus always commended and modeled a simple life-style, thrift and frugality. When everything belongs to the Lord, it is more important how we use what is left over for personal use.

F. Stewardship in the Early Christian Church

The first group of Christians to apply Jesus' teaching on stewardship were the believers who were His contemporaries. Some of them sold all their possessions and gave the proceeds to the poor (Acts 2:45). A spirit of sharing was prevalent. Believers did not insist on exclusive ownership of their possessions (Acts 4:32). Ananias and Sapphira had the power to decide whether or not to sell their possessions as well as the power to decide whether to give it to the church (Acts 5:4). Mary retained the ownership of a house of considerable size (Acts 12:12-16).

We must conclude that the early disciples did grasp Jesus' teaching of stewardship and practised it. Those who sold their property and possessions did so voluntarily and not out of compulsion. Several years later the church at An-

tioch helped the church at Jerusalem financially (Acts 11:27-30). Paul also made requests for assistance on behalf of the Jerusalem church among Gentile churches (II Cor. 8:1ff.). In any event, the Scriptural record would suggest that the motivation for giving to the Lord's work during the apostolic era was motivated by an inner sense of people's relation to God (II Cor. 9:5). Religion found its expression in terms of Christian stewardship. It must be stated, though, that it did not always go forward triumphantly, and occasionally also suffered from obstacles and reverses.

In reflecting on these practises, it must be remembered that Jesus lived among Jewish people who practised tithing, as prescribed by the Law. In His discourse, Jesus refers to tithing only twice. In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, he chides the former for his pride in adhering to the formal religious practise of fasting and tithing. Jesus did not condemn tithing; indeed He endorsed the practise (Matt. 23:22); but He condemned the Pharasaic spirit in which it was done.

The New Testament does not contain any mention of someone paying 10% of his possessions as his annual contribution to the Lord. On the contrary, the early believers' understanding of Jesus' teaching was that their life and possessions all belonged to God. Their whole-hearted generosity surpassed that of the Jews, whose benevolence was determined by a mathematical calculation of one-tenth for the Lord. This was only what the Lord expected of them, according to Matthew 5:20.

New Testament teaching on stewardship is often assumed to mean tithing. The law of the Old Testament states: "Thou shalt offer the Lord thy God of your tithes and first fruits." Jesus in the New Testament says: "Go sell what thou hast and give it to the poor" (Matthew 19:21). We must conclude that Jesus' teaching of stewardship is more demanding, far-reaching and responsible; it is a way of life.

How did the church of the second, third and fourth centuries regard Jesus' teaching of stewardship? In carrying out the command to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth great financial resources were needed. No Christian writer appealed to the Jewish practises of tithing, because

it was no more binding on them than the practises of circumcision. Their appeal was based on sharing their possessions as Christian stewards. Justin Martyr (AD 165) tells in his *First Apology*⁶ of services on the Lord's day and concludes "Then they that are able and willing give what they think fit; and what is thus collected is laid up in the hands of the president, who distributes it to the orphans and widows, and other Christians as their wants require." This demonstrates the spirit and method of the understanding of stewardship as practised by the early church. Tithing belonged to the law and consequently was a lower form of generosity, just as the law is inferior to the Gospels.

During the fourth century the Old Testament practise of tithing began to find its way into the Christian church. In the course of time the church expanded and various institutions were formed which made it necessary to find basic methods of ensuring their support.⁷ Consequently, the payment of tithes was adapted from the Old Testament law. In 779 Charlemagne made payment of tithe to the church a law of the Empire. This eventually affected all European countries. It was not until the thirteenth century that the Old Testament scope of tithing was extended from agricultural products (first fruits) to include profits from merchandising and trading. At the time of the Reformation, no reformers questioned this practise except the Anabaptists.

II. MOTIVATION FOR STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship expresses man's fundamental and continuing response to the grace of God.⁸ It cannot be considered as only one aspect of Christian discipleship. It is everything a person does as a Christian. Any classification of the term to a narrower scope must be recognized as unbiblical.

We immediately come to the question of what motivates our response to the grace of God we have experienced? The lowest form of motivation is that God rewards our righteousness by blessing us in return with material goods. In the lives of Old Testament prophets, Paul and many godly servants of the Lord we see living witnesses which contradict such an understanding. Material blessings are not the rewards for our generosity.

It is generally accepted that there are two basic ideals of practising stewardship. The first is spiritual. A person feels the impulse from the heart filled with good motives. He recognizes that he has been created in the image of God and is an object of God's saving grace. In response, he wants to place his personal talents, time, possessions and opportunities at the disposal of the Lord. Jesus pointed to the spiritual motivation in the Sermon on the Mount.

The second response is termed a legal response. The impulse to give is usually prompted externally by some prescription or law. Over a period of time, the Old Testament tithe came to be regarded as a legal requirement of the law. Today many Christians only respond to some form of external motivation.

In practise, the two ideals are often intermingled. For many believers, there is a great need for biblical instruction and understanding on the subject of stewardship. The external form of motivation is often used in a congregation, but the pastor must be very clear on the distinction between the two in his own mind. Giving a sum of money and stewardship are not identical concepts. Stewardship includes giving, but giving is only one phase of stewardship.

The primary emphasis in stewardship has often been strictly financial. In fact, the giving of money is the easiest and least important part of Christian stewardship. The proper management of the part not given is often a greater and more significant test of stewardship than the act of giving. When Jesus spoke of stewardship, he never spoke of giving money alone, but of the total life of the believer.

III. STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES

Some basic stewardship principles emerge from the New Testament which we must keep in mind.

1. Gifts. Jesus clearly recognized a diversity of gifts in His parables (Matt. 25:14, 15) and Paul emphasized these in his ministry (I Cor. 12:4).

2. Managers. The believer is a steward of the possessions entrusted to him, not an owner (Luke 19:13).

3. Faithfulness. Jesus made faithfulness the test of a

person's integrity. The means for testing that faithfulness to Him is the handling of personal possessions, (Luke 16:10, 11), the use of time, talents, etc.

4. Accountability. In every parable on stewardship, Jesus stressed the accountability of the steward of the Lord (Luke 19:13).

5. Value of personal life. God has purchased each life with the blood of Christ on the cross and consequently places an inestimable value on it (I Cor. 6:20).

6. Sacred Trust. Not only our possessions, but the gospel and grace of God are a sacred trust placed in the hands of the believers (I Tim. 6:20).

7. Ministry as Stewards. The entire scope of the believer's life is under the stewardship of Christ and must be lived responsibly (I Peter 4:10).

IV. AREAS OF ACTION

Several suggestions could be made which may stimulate our thinking into positive action.

A. Teach Christian Stewardship

This is a very sensitive subject in most evangelical churches today. Frequently an external appeal is made for a worthy cause or project based on a current need. This is commendable because by human nature we need to be challenged to give. Many believers continue to do so on a regular basis in a great variety of ways. The ongoing support of our mission programs, institutions, colleges, Seminary and local congregational needs are the witness of many faithful stewards of Jesus Christ.

It is suggested that we still need a systematic teaching program of stewardship as an integral part of the Christian education program of the local church. This would need to be a long-range program because the Scriptural principles need to be analyzed and worked out very thoroughly in order to apply Christian stewardship as a way of life. Much could be achieved on a short-range basis by a series of messages on the topic followed up by smaller group sessions in the Adult and Youth departments in the Sunday school

classes. Another alternative would be to organize an elective course on stewardship to be taught during the Sunday school period.

In any event we need to dig into Scripture to recapture for our generation the full scope of the meaning of Christian stewardship. We need to go beyond the concept of financial giving and to understand it as Jesus taught it as a way of life. The best setting for rediscovering what this means would be the local church.

B. Proclamation

To proclaim stewardship would necessarily mean to challenge individuals to accept this as a way of life. Possibly the most obvious vocations where this is being done is in the pastoral, preaching, or teaching ministry and in missions at home or abroad. The Kingdom of God can be built only as men and women declare themselves prepared to accept the full-time ministry for the Lord. There continues to be an ongoing need for trained persons who are prepared to devote their gifts to the Lord's ministry. This is particularly true as congregations look for a pastor or associate pastor, as well as candidates for the mission boards. Believing cannot occur without hearing—hearing cannot take place without proclamation of the Word by believers (Rom 10:14).

C. Vocational Implications

Stewardship of life can be expressed in every vocation, if it is based on motivation of service and help to fellowman. The farmer, teacher, homemaker, physician, surgeon, attorney, mechanic and airline pilot all have unique opportunities to express the love of Christ in very practical terms. To exercise Christian stewardship, it is not necessary to undergo a change of vocation to full-time ministry or to a church-related ministry. To exercise Christian stewardship, it is necessary to provide a clear witness of a biblical vision of values, priorities and goals in the chosen vocation God has given each person. Christians can provide an example of a new ethic of stewardship; they can provide guidance for society into a new direction; they can be models of a biblical vision within their chosen vocations.

D. Lifestyle

Currently, the United States has 6 percent of the world's population and yet it consumes approximately 35 percent of the world's energy and natural resources. This is geared to maintaining our current lifestyle. In many cases the desire for resources increases, because it is based on the secular idol of unlimited resources. During the last decade we have been jolted by the stark realization that the earth's resources are not unlimited.

Because of limited resources on earth, economic growth and development cannot continue indefinitely. A drastic change will need to take place. Stewardship demands that all of the earth and its resources belong to the Lord and will need to be shared with all people on earth. It implies further that our first commitment is not to protect our own extravagant lifestyle at the expense of other people. Instead, we must catch a new vision of biblical stewardship and apply it in all areas of vocational and daily life.

The power of a Christian lifestyle is monumental.⁹ As God's people, the Bible assumes that Christians will make an impact on society and its goals. It is not the individual's action alone that makes the difference; it is God's people gathered together and showing forth a new lifestyle that will make an impact. If the church and its members are to make an abiding contribution to our society, it must be free of society's idolatries. We must be liberated from being captive to our culture's way of thinking, values and priorities. We will need to shift the basic components of our lifestyle and learn new ways to achieve more with fewer resources.

E. Stewardship of Influence

Many Christians are holding positions of responsibility and influence in the church, society and government. This is a credit to their gifts and contributions to their fellowmen. It also follows that this trust bestowed on them needs to be handled with great care and discernment. The actions and words of a person in a position of influence have a far greater impact than those of a person on the street.

We need to recognize the stewardship of influence of

such a person. This goes far beyond the stewardship of time, talents and funds. Throughout history godly men in a strategic position have made their positive influence felt because of their Christian convictions which changed the course of history. As full participants in a democratic society it is not only our Christian privilege to be faithful stewards of our Christian influence, it is our responsibility. This is what Jesus meant when he exhorted the believer to "let his light shine before men." Every believer has the gifts, opportunities and responsibilities to be a steward of his Christian influence.

F. Service Opportunities

As young people and couples come to understand the biblical teaching of stewardship, they look for a practical application of their insights. The many camping programs we offer provide young people with short-term summer opportunities. Christian service opportunities abroad have been a good challenge to many, although it appears that many more could be used. The requests for people to serve with the Mennonite Central Committee at home or abroad has been a constant challenge. More people are constantly needed.

We must not overlook the very important area of service opportunities where we work and live. Most people will not leave home and take up fulltime ministry elsewhere, and yet they are also called to be fulltime stewards as disciples of Jesus Christ. Each local church has a constant need for people to devote their time and gifts in a variety of service projects. The kingdom of God is being built in the local church in direct proportion to the number of people who are willing to give of their time, energy and money.

NOTES

- 1 R.S. Cushman, *The Message of Stewardship*, (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1946), p. 17.
- 2 T.K. Thompson, *Stewardship in Contemporary Life*, (New York: Association Press, 1965), p. 9.
- 3 A.J. Konrad, "Mobilizing our Human Resources," *1974 Yearbook* (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches), p. 1.
- 4 W.C. Moro, *Stewardship*, (St. Louis, MO: The Bethany Press, 1932), p. 139.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- 8 T.K. Thompson, *Stewardship in Contemporary Life*, (New York: Association Press, 1965), p. 17.
- 9 G.O. Hatfield, "Finding the Energy to Continue", *Christianity Today*, February 8, 1980, p. 24.

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PART FOUR

THE DENOMINATIONAL SCENE

CHAPTER X

THE TEACHING MINISTRY OF THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH

John B. Toews

Introduction

The teaching of the Scriptures provided the seedbed for the revival movement in the Mennonite communities of South Russia. This spiritual awakening resulted in the birth of the Mennonite Brethren Fellowship.¹ The 1840's and 1850's witnessed the rise of small groups of people gathering together to be taught from the Scriptures.² The Secession Document³ expresses the conflict the early brethren felt between the teaching of the Scriptures and the life of the church of the Mennonite community. Profession and practice were in contradiction.

The commitment of the leading brethren of the movement to integrate life and doctrine served as the point of reference in the early struggles of the Mennonite Brethren Church. It also served as the final criteria in the "June Reform"⁴ which set the course for the life of the fellowship.

The history of the Mennonite Brethren Church reflects the central concern for understanding the Scriptures and for the importance of the teaching ministry for the life of the church.

I. THE TEACHING MINISTRY AS A CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

In the early years of the Mennonite Brethren Church the teaching ministry was recognized as a corporate responsibility.⁵ The fellowship of the believers appointed those from their midst whom they recognized as possessing the gift of teaching. Their selection by the church made them responsible to the church. This responsibility required a quality of character and life as a prerequisite for the teaching ministry as well as faithfulness in the interpretation of Scriptures.⁶ The corporate responsibility for the teaching ministry found further expression in that official confirmation or ordination of teachers of the Word was not only a concern of the local fellowship but also of the conference.⁷

The brotherhood watched carefully over the spiritual walk of those called to teach.⁸ Ministers and deacons conferences in the Mennonite Brethren Church have historically wrestled with establishing the qualifications for persons in the teaching ministry.⁹

An indication of the corporate responsibility for the teaching ministry within the brotherhood was the provision for an extensive itinerant ministry. Brethren with special gifts in teaching and expounding the Word were assigned to itinerate under the supervision of a conference-appointed body. They were also financed from a conference treasury. The character of this ministry was both instructional, for the believing community, and evangelistic, for the unconverted. "The crucial role of this itinerant ministry for the early Mennonite Brethren Church cannot be over emphasized. It promoted unity of faith and practice and was the most important avenue for church extension."¹¹ The first church in Canada was established in 1888 through the itinerant ministry of Heinrich Voth. It is rather significant to note the close inter-relatedness of *Seelenpflege*—spiritual care for the believers—and the outreach to unsaved people.¹²

The training process for younger and inexperienced teachers of the Word also emerged from a corporate inter-relationship. The younger brethren appointed to the

teaching ministry by the discerning community served together with the men of experience. Some younger men become Timothys to brethren in the itinerant ministry. Their sharing in the Bible teaching and evangelistic outreach included both the pulpit ministry as well as the person to person evangelism. The benefits which have come to my own ministry through prolonged periods of traveling and ministering with such brethren as N.N. Hiebert, A.H. Unruh, and my own father, J.A. Toews, were of profound significance both for my understanding of the Scriptures and for the development of teaching and preaching methods.

II. THE TEACHING MINISTRY AS A PROCESS OF SHARED DISCERNMENT

The house church, known since the days of the Apostolic Church, was from the beginning a vital expression of the Anabaptist movement. In places where the Mennonite movement became institutionalized, as was the case in Prussia, Poland and Russia, the groups meeting in the homes, read the Scriptures, shared their understanding of the Word, prayed, and sought to contextualize the teachings of the Scriptures. The itinerant ministry was also largely a gathering of the scattered believers in the homes for the study of the Word and prayer.¹⁴

Bibelstunde (Bible Study Hour, as the home Bible fellowships were called) focused on a given book of the Bible, usually the New Testament, but occasionally also the Psalms. The men of the group would sit around the table with their open Bibles. They would take turns reading a portion and giving their understanding. Others would add their insight concerning the meaning and application. In cases where the group could not find agreement on the meaning of the Scriptures it would assign some members to consult other resources and continue the discussion at the next meeting until the group found consensus. (The resources which were consulted for additional light were such commentaries as Dächsls *Bibelwerk*, Paul Fabiankes *Praktische Bibelerklärung*, Zellers *Biblisches Woerterbuch*, *Stuttgarter Biblisches Nachschlagewerk*, Buechners

Hankonkordanz, the writings of Menno Simons, and a selection of devotional writings by such men as Otto Stockmeyer, F.B. Meyer, Ernst Modersohn, Ernst Bebbhardt and others.) The women provided the listening audience for these discussions with the liberty to ask an occasional question.¹⁵ The teaching and learning process resulting from these Bible Study Hours cannot be overestimated.

The formal educational program in the Mennonite colonies in Russia provided a different kind of biblical instruction. One hour each school day was devoted to the study of the Bible. This process over a period of six years provided a framework of reference which in itself offered a good foundation for the process of further study. God's relationship to the world, to history, and to man as an individual was the focus of this religious instruction. The level of inquiry into the Scriptures in the schools was more practical than theological.

III. BIBEL-BESPRECHUNGEN (BIBLE CONFERENCES)

The Bible study in the homes was supported at the larger congregational levels by "Bibel-Besprechungen." These Bible Conferences involved sister congregations and guests who would travel long distances to participate.

Church leaders, ministers and teachers of the congregations considered these Bible conferences as an essential avenue for biblical instruction. For each conference—an annual event in every organized church—a book of the Bible or some selected chapters were selected. One of the ministers would present a general introduction to the book. The study that followed assumed the form of a discussion more than a lecture. Teachers, ministers and the people from the pews participated. The process was a verse by verse study. Here and there one of the more gifted teachers would summarize the major truths which emerged from the discussions. Ministers from the congregations would participate in as many Bible conferences of this nature as possible by attending the gatherings in their area and even in distant localities. For many of them, these Bible conferences

became a resource for the teaching and preaching ministry in their respective congregations.

The two levels of Bible Studies, the "Bibelstunde" as a small group process, and "Bibel Besprechung" in the context of the broader congregational setting, must be recognized as a most effective avenue in the teaching ministry of the Mennonite Brethren fellowship.

IV. PREDIGER KURSE (MINISTER'S SEMINARS)

The lay ministry in the Mennonite Brethren church—where the local congregation selected men from their own midst—was not maintained without other specialized training. Beyond the day school, Bible hour, home Bible studies and the annual Bible conferences the brotherhood arranged special training courses for ministers. Teachers for these special instructions were brethren who had acquired advanced training either through systematic self-study or in the context of academic institutions. Selected brethren from Russia would be sent to schools in Germany and Switzerland (Baptist Seminary in Hamburg, St. Crischona training center in Basel). In North America the Baptist Seminary in Rochester became a major training center for selected brethren. Those who through experience and/or academic training were equipped to teach other ministers served as resource people for these Minister's Seminars. In Russia, Jakob Reimer, David Duerksen, Herman Neufeld, Peter Koehn, and J.G. Wiens were some of the brethren conducting the Minister's Seminars.¹⁸ In North America, Heinrich Voth, Abram Schellenberg, Johan Regehr, and Wm. Bestvater were some of the brethren providing instructions for their fellow-ministers.

The teaching ministry during the first half century of Mennonite Brethren history thus was not through a professional ministry or institutional programs, but rather in the context of a brotherhood fellowship based in the *Bibelstuden* (Bible hour), Bible conferences (*Bibel Besprechungen*), and Minister's Seminars.

V. OTHER AGENCIES

The Family.—Mennonite Brethren historically have been a covenant people. Receptions into the church membership required a response of commitment to governing principles of life and ethics as the church understood them. The practice of daily family devotions was part of the covenant commitment. The father, as priest of the household, would lead the family in Bible reading and prayer. Systematic reading through the Bible was encouraged. The actual effectiveness of these family worship hours in some cases is open to question and would vary according to method and the ability of parents to apply the reading to the daily life of the family.¹⁹ The custom, however, was significant as a teaching agency, setting forth the centrality of the Bible for the life of a family as well as the individual. Bible reading did become part of the daily style of many Mennonite Brethren families.

The Sunday School.—Provision was made early in the history of the Brethren for the instruction of children in the Sunday school. In Russia this effort was an adjunct to the regular worship service. Because most children participated in the religious instruction of the village school, the character of this instruction was primarily devotional, with an emphasis on the need for personal conversion and a consistent Christian life. The results of such emphases raised questions about the validity of child conversion.²⁰ The character of the Sunday school in the American setting (1874) and the Canadian setting (1888) was essentially the same. With the adoption of the International Sunday School Lessons as a guide, no provision was made for a systematic study of the historical context of the Scriptures, as was provided by the religious instruction in the day school in Russia. The emphasis remained more devotional, and did not provide a historical frame of reference, essential for the understanding of God's relationship to history and men in general. Some attempt to restore the systematic study of the Bible as given in the school system of the Mennonite Colonies in Russia was made through the Saturday schools with an emphasis on German and Bible. These efforts were

necessary to enable the children and youth to benefit from the teaching and worship program of the church fellowship.

The Canadian and American scene, with people living on farms instead of in villages, made the continued practice of the group Bible studies difficult. The adult Sunday school to an extent became the American replacement for the Bible study hour in Russia. In some localities where people lived in small towns the practice of the Bible study hour continued. In general, however, the mid-week Bible study and prayer services in the church, which do not provide the close fellowship and general participation in the interpretation of the Scriptures, have taken the place of the Bible study hour of the past. The introduction of Sunday school material prepared by publishers who are strongly motivated by marketing possibilities had a phenomenal influence on the instructional character and values of our Sunday schools. The suppliers of the material: Scripture Press, Gospel Light, Cook, and others adapt the biblical material to become acceptable to the widest possible clientele. The principle of accommodation in the interpretation of biblical truth, governed by a marketing appeal, results in an emphasis void of focus in matters of faith and life. In addition to the lack of focus in textual interpretation and application many of our Sunday schools are strongly influenced by the techniques of Child Evangelism, Kid's Bible Clubs, and others. The programs of Boys Brigades and Pioneer Girls, widely followed in many of Mennonite Brethren Churches, with an emphasis on social activities, with brief devotional consideration, does not provide a systematic Bible teaching program.

The "Jugendverein" (Youth Association)—In North America the institution of the Youth Association became a teaching agency. On alternative Sundays the evening service consisted of a program sponsored by the youth of the church. The organizational structure provided a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer and some members to serve as participants in a program committee. The programs were mostly prepared and presented by youth or family groups. All talents from within the church were engaged—group singing, solos, quartets, duets, string and brass instruments, recitation of poems and dialogues, story

telling and a formal address on an assigned subject by one of the young people. The record of the minutes of these meetings suggest a very broad range of doctrinal, ethical and social issues that were considered in these addresses.

As an example we note the following subject in the program of the Youth Association of a church in California in 1942. In a series on the subject of "Following Jesus," the question was discussed: What does Jesus' command "Follow Me" mean for us today? In our daily walk? In our prayer life? In our response to the command: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel?" Other subjects dealt with by the young people of the same church in 1942 were: What must I do to be saved? How can we know that Christ is truly the Son of God? Three essentials for Christian Growth (I Peter 2:22; II Timothy 2:15; I Thess. 5:12, 18; Luke 10:42-43); The Christian's Hope (I Cor. 15:19-22); The Second Coming of Christ—when and how? The Christian's relationship to war.

All of the subjects enumerated were dealt with by young people. Those who dealt with such subjects in 1942 are today in leadership positions within the brotherhood.²² The youth program did serve as a major factor in generating personal responsibility and the initiation of youth into the life of the church. It was a training process and recruiting base for leadership in the local church and conference. The loss sustained in the gradual discontinuation of this teaching/participation process in the local church during the past 25 years, without any provision to take its place, has serious implication for the future.

Women's Missionary Societies: The Missionary goal of the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century with its renewal in the Pietistic revivals of the 17th and 18th centuries was also part of the new life that came to the Mennonite Brethren. The records of local churches²³ indicate the formation of societies beginning in 1886 and continuing thereafter. The character of the weekly or biweekly meetings consisted of devotional programs in Bible study, group prayer meetings for the program of foreign missions, and preparing articles for the annual mission sale.²⁴ The amount of time many mothers gave to Mission Societies established the importance of missions in family life and the

church program. A large part of the Conference mission budget was the result of these mission societies, the annual mission sale and the mission festivals. Testimonies from mission candidates, volunteering for service, have often referred to the work of their mothers in the mission societies as providing the earliest impressions of the obligations of the church for the people who know not the saving gospel of Christ.²⁵ The educational influence of this practical phase of the church program must be recognized historically as a factor in the missionary interest of our churches. The practical example of priority demonstrated by the mothers of the home and the confirmation of the importance of missions in the emphasis of the mission festivals was direction giving for the life of the Mennonite Brethren movement until the 1950's. The effectiveness of the more recent models of women's organizations as an educational and spiritual influence requires a careful evaluation in the context of present interests and priorities in missions.

In the context of the patterns reviewed: the Bible study groups on the local level, the Bible conferences, the Minister's Seminars, the family, the Sunday school, the Youth Association and the missionary societies, the teaching ministry was a corporate process involving shared discernment. Leadership was selected and trained in the community. It was a leadership born within the redeemed community, trained through the process of experiential relationships and confirmed by the Brotherhood on the Conference level. This process provided ministers from a common frame of reference in their personal experience of salvation, an understanding of the Scriptures tempered by group discernment, a lifestyle molded in an integrated spiritual and social function, and a loyalty rooted in a corporate to Christ as the Lord of the church and to the Brotherhood whom they loved and of whom they were a part.

VI. INSTITUTIONS AND THE TRAINING OF MINISTERS

The social and economic openness of the North American cultural scene were threatening for people from

the closed communities of Russia. The youth of the church were exposed to the broader social fabric of the national life, especially through the state operated public schools. The religious instruction, which in Russia was provided in the Mennonite controlled system of education, here needed to be provided by the church. As early as 1884, under the leadership of J.F. Harms, a short term Bible school was provided in Canada, Kansas and transferred to Lehigh, Kansas in 1886.²⁶ John F. Duerksen established a Bible school in Buhler, Kansas in 1888.²⁷ The Corn Bible School, Corn, Oklahoma had its beginning in 1902.²⁸ The Gethsemane Bible School in Fairview, Oklahoma came to life in 1905²⁹ and Tabor College opened in 1908.³⁰ The first Bible school in Canada was established in Herbert, Saskatchewan, by J.F. Harms in 1911. The large migration from Russia to Canada in the years 1924-1930 set the stage for the establishment of additional Bible schools which totalled thirteen by 1936.³¹ The focus of these schools in the initial years was on Bible content, doctrine, ethics and missions in a strong pietistic devotional context. A strong emphasis on the German language was predominant in all these programs. A selected number of "purpose statements" read as follows:

"To teach the Word of God, the German language and Mennonite customs"³³

"Preservation of the German language, Bible instruction and preparing the young people for service."³⁴

"Preservation of the German language, teaching Bible and preparing students for work of missions at home and abroad."³⁵

Tabor College, the first more advanced academic institution in Mennonite Brethren history, stated as its aim: "To prepare workers for home and foreign missions and for work in Sunday school, as part of the church program."³⁶

The Bible schools in Canada, while perpetuating the German language gave strong emphasis to the preparation of young people for the work of the local church and missions. The broad emphasis on the training of workers provided an essential base for the selection of the teachers and ministers

from the ranks of the local congregation. The occasion for the establishment of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg indicated the necessity of more advanced training in the church and its institutions, as well as the need to provide college courses for young people seeking professional training and university education.

The trend towards more general—"secular-professional" education—not only changed Bible institutes into colleges, but also transformed the U.S.A. Bible schools into high schools: Tabor College Academy, Corn Bible Academy, Immanuel Academy, Zoar Academy, etc. In Canada high schools emerged as institutions separate from the Bible schools and thus provided a two-pronged educational effort. (Christian high schools still flourishing are: Eden Christian College, Ontario; Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, Winnipeg; Mennonite Educational Institute, Clearbrook.)

The process of cultural change—from the village to the city, from the land to professional and industrial occupations—exerted pressure to establish colleges with full academic accreditation equal to the state university program (Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas; Fresno Pacific College, Fresno; Mennonite Brethren College of Arts, Winnipeg, Manitoba).

The spiral for educational demands did not stop here. The forces of cultural change from the model of a rural agriculturally based people to a people moving into the ranks of the professional community of higher education (medicine, commercial ventures, workers in industry and development of various specialized trades) challenged the adequacy of a lay ministry in the spiritual nurture and leadership of the church. (The words "lay ministry" are used in a qualified sense. Theologically and functionally the Mennonite Brethren Fellowship does not recognize the distinction between a lay and a professional ministry.) The efforts of Tabor College, 1943, and of the Bible College in Winnipeg, 1961-62 in adding to the college program a Graduate program in theological studies proved to be only a short term solution. The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary emerged (U.S.A. 1955-Canada 1975).

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The brief sketch outlining the various dimensions of the teaching ministry in the Mennonite Brethren church provides only a limited context for understanding the implications of teaching in our tradition. A more comprehensive analytical history covering the teaching ministry in the life and work of the Brotherhood is needed.

The teachers and leaders in the earlier history of the Mennonite Brethren Church (1860-1940-approximately) emerged from a relational process within the redeemed community. They shared common experiences of salvation and fellowship. Their understanding of the Scripture was gained in a group discernment process provided through the Small Group Bible Studies (*Bibelstunde*) Bible Conferences (*Bibel Besprechungen*) and Minister's Seminars (*Prediger Kurse*). Their lifestyle was molded in an integrated spiritual and social community. A corporate covenant commitment of faith and life to Christ as Lord and the Scripture as their guide to govern their walk and relationship as individuals and as a community gave a basis for deep loyalty to the fellowship and a brotherhood understanding of the Scriptures.

The influence of the home, with the continual practice of family worship, and the participation of children and youth in the various experiences of the fellowship, had a molding influence in relating members to the church fellowship. The youth meetings, as described under Youth Association, provided stimulation for the discovery of the gifts within the community and the arena for the exercise of gifts in the context of the public meetings of the congregations. The youth developed their understanding of the Christian life not in Youth Department programs, functionally independent of the adult community. "Parents and children of the old and the young must live, work, and share together to be the true family of God," was a slogan frequently repeated.³⁷

The recruitment and training of leadership in the context of an inter-related lifestyle emerged as a natural outgrowth from the character and function of the community.

The major changes in the cultural environment of recent decades dislodged the teaching ministry of the church from

that of an integrated relational life's process to alternative and separate institutional structures. The Bible school, a good provision for the teaching assignment of the church, became an institution for the training of the youth and replaced the teaching process in the context of the relational life of the church.

The need for high school education to meet the occupational and professional demands of the changing culture added to the multidimensional influence in the formation of value judgments. The Christian high schools provided by the Brotherhood for their young people became a bridge to span the distance developing between the world of youth and adults. The church colleges were born under pressure to extend the equipping of the emerging generation, to preserve a Christian world view, and to prepare youth for service in the world and in the church.

The purposes of the various institutions today are partly reflected in the following statements:

"The necessity for Bible schools is: (1) to guard the souls of our youth from the danger of being lost; (2) to equip our youth to stand against the dangers of our age; (3) to preserve our youth for the church to prevent the latter from gradual death."

"The purpose of the Bible schools is recognized to be the following: (1) to meet the inner needs of the young people through Bible instruction; (2) to prepare the youth for a defense against worldliness (birth control is especially mentioned as one of the dangerous phenomena of worldliness)."³⁸

The brotherhood concern expressed in the establishment of our colleges is most clearly reflected from a statement of a conference committee at the time when the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches assumed responsibility for Tabor College. "It is the general expectation that in the future Bible instruction will be given the first place in Tabor College. It shall serve as a place where our youth can receive the basic biblical instruction and that those who have been in Bible schools before coming to Tabor College shall be able to extend their biblical studies. According to possibilities a program of high school and junior college shall be offered but with the condition

that the Bible school remains the first priority. In consideration of the direction of character and financial provision the Bible school shall be the determining factor of priority.³⁹

While our intentions to retain the stated priority have continued, cultural changes have influenced the character of the teaching ministry. The selection and training of the ministers has shifted from the relational life of the community to institutional agencies. The teaching process in the Church has lost its interrelational character. The leadership teachers and preachers are not born and trained in the bosom of the community. Men are often being trained in institutions other than our own and bring back to us concepts and practices from the broader tradition of American Evangelicalism.⁴⁰ Our theological identity in concept and character has become strongly influenced through this process.⁴¹ The establishment of our own Seminary, another institution, became a necessity to rebuild a unified direction in the understanding of our commitment of faith and mission.⁴² Such understanding is conditioned by a renewed realization that the Mennonite Brotherhood, after the model of the New Testament church, does not provide for the independence of the individual in faith, life and practice as is generally held in the culture of a modern secularized society. The teaching ministry of the Mennonite Brethren church today is seeking to establish the basic interdependent principles characteristic of the New Testament church. The early years of the Mennonite Brethren fellowship, as reviewed in the earlier part of this paper nurtured the basic qualities of such interrelationship. Our contemporary culture of independent individualism places upon us the demand to return to the relational interdependent character of the teaching ministry as seen in the redeemed community of the New Testament.

NOTES

- 1 Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* (1789-1910) English translation, 1978, pp. 206-207.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 230-232.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 436-445.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 437.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 437.
- 7 General Conference Yearbooks (later indicated by abbreviation G.C.Y.) 1933, p. 65; 1954, pp. 6-7, 22.
- 8 P.M. Friesen, *Op. Cit.* pp. 241-242.
- 9 Alberta Conference Minutes, December 1940—paper presented by Jacob Thiessen. Copy in Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno.
- 10 P.M. Friesen, *Op. cit.* pp. 968-974, G.C.Y., 1878-1888; 1889, P. 84; 1889, pp. 89-91.
- 11 J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, Board of Christian Literature of General Conference Mennonite Brethren Church, 1975, p. 196.
- 12 P.M. Friesen, *Op cit.*, pp. 968-974.
- 13 *Ibid.*, chapter IX "Unrest and Reform Efforts in the Molotschna Churches," pp. 92-109.
- 14 A.H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde*, 1955. The General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren, Hillsboro, Kansas, pp. 1947-1950.
- 15 The practice of the "Bibelstunden" was a vital part of my personal experience from early childhood up to the age of 21, the time when I left my native village in South Russia.
- 16 Note content of "Biblische Geschichte" in its historical context and application to each lesson. The sources for the instruction were *Die Biblischen Geschichten des Alten und Neuen Testaments* von Otto Zuck (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Mauke, 1886, 1911).
- 17 Records of these "Bibelbesprechungen" can be found in the records of the Canadian provincial conferences. The records from the churches in Russia are not available. I personally have been an active participant in these con-

- ferences from the time I was a teenager through many years of my active ministry. See P.M. Friesen, pp. 968ff.
- 18 A.H. Unruh, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-242.
 - 19 Personal experience of my own background from childhood and youth as well as the years of pastoral ministry.
 - 20 A.H. Unruh, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.
 - 21 Minutes of the *Jugendvereins* (Youth Association meetings were kept over periods of 30 to 50 years depending on the functional history of the church. Most of such minutes are being preserved in the form of microfilm in the archives of the Centers for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, Winnipeg and Hillsboro.
 - 22 Minutes of the "Jugendverein" of the Shafter Mennonite Brethren Church from 1942. Copies in archives, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Biblical Seminary, Fresno.
 - 23 Minutes of the churches in Minnesota, North Dakota, Saskatchewan and Manitoba-Study Center, Fresno, California.
 - 24 The church minutes and oral reports by older brethren and sisters give glowing reports of the blessings and benefits of these Festivals and mission sales-Carson and Mountain Lake records. Center of Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.
 - 25 This influence is traceable in the written testimonies of mission candidates where they relate the experience and trace the influence which led them to offer their life for missions—confidential records of personal papers of missionaries in Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.
 - 26 J.B. Toews—"Influences that have affected educational processes in Mennonite Brethren schools" unpublished essay October 21, 1976. pp. 18-19. Fresno Archives.
 - 27 A.G. Duerksen—Biography of John F. Duerksen—unpublished manuscript—Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.
 - 28 Lloyd Chester Penner—The Mennonites on the Washita River—Doctoral dissertation Oklahoma State University 1976, pp. 203-204.

- 29 Pamphlet from Fairview Mennonite Brethren Church 1905—Fresno Archives.
- 30 Tabor College Catalogue 1908—Fresno Archives.
- 31 J.B. Toews—*op. cit.* p. 8.
- 32 Reflection from the printed programs of the Bible schools—collection in center for Mennonite Brethern Studies, Fresno, California.
- 33 Pamphlet released by the Fairview M.B. Church 1905, *ibid.*
- 34 Pamphlet, Herbert Bible School 1911-1913—in Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.
- 35 Corn Bible School perspective 1902, *ibid.*
- 36 Tabor College catalogue 1908, *ibid.*
- 37 Strongly underlined by my father on the occasion of his last visit to our home, while I was a pastor in Reedley (1950). The separate youth department and youth meetings were an occasion of concern to him. He felt that eventually these would have negative effects in the all community relationship of the church.
- 38 Minutes of the conference of Bible school teachers August 8-10, 1941, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan—*ibid.*
- 39 Conference Committee report to the churches in 1934—copy in Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.
- 40 Paul Toews, ed., *Pilgrims and Strangers*. Essays in Mennonite Brethren History-1977. Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California. Essay by Clarence Hiebert, "The Development of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America—Some Reflections, Interpretations and Viewpoints" pp. 11-132.
- 41 Essay by J.B. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Ideality and Theological Diversity" pp. 133-157.
- 42 A.J. Klassen ed., *The Seminary Story* —1975, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary pp. 17-24. Chapter 2, Focusing the Vision. *The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary*, by J.B. Toews.

CHAPTER XI

TEACHING APPRECIATION FOR OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

Leslie Mark

Every Christian denomination has inherited much from its forebears. Teachings, ideals and values have been passed from one generation to another. These ideals may be designated as a spiritual heritage. Most denominations frequently appeal to their history and the beliefs of their founding fathers to reaffirm their reason for existence.

A spiritual heritage may be beneficial or detrimental to the progress of a church. It may be praiseworthy or embarrassing. For good or for ill the process of history tends to synthesize and transform the original ideals of these distinctive groups. Historical processes also modify existing institutions. Like all other groups the Mennonite Brethren Church has changed considerably through the passing of time. In spite of the changes that occur, however, there are always values and ideals which remain intact. These are examined and re-examined in the light of Scripture, and every effort is put forth to maintain those which coincide with the Word of God. The appreciation of this is that which the Biblical Seminary attempts to teach.

It is important to note that a guarantee of divine providence is the inexorable march of the church of Christ toward its predetermined victory over the influence and forces of evil. The Mennonite Brethren are a part of that church. The church of Christ waxes and wanes in its purity and influence through the passing of time. When it tends to wane God raises up men and women of courage to proclaim again the truths that need to be emphasized. The record of history

testifies that these truths often revive the church and challenge others to full conviction and dedication to the Lord. At times this revival has been at the cost of expulsion, persecution, and even death. But the church has been saved.

The Biblical Seminary teaches that the Mennonite Brethren denomination came into being as a result of the convictions of men moved to righteousness by the Holy Spirit. These nineteenth century descendents of the early Anabaptists were moved to a holy dissatisfaction. The Bible which had been neglected was re-emphasized, and the early ideals which had made the Mennonites a people were rediscovered. Smoldering flames of truth which had almost been extinguished by zeal for ethnic purity, self-preservation, and materialism were fanned again by hope into light and power. This is seen in the Document of Secession in 1860 which expressed the burden of the founders of the Mennonite Brethren. It reads:

We, the undersigned, have by the grace of God, recognized the decadent condition of the Mennonite Brotherhood, and can for God's and conscience' sake no longer continue therein. For we fear the inevitable judgment of God, since the openly godless living and their wickedness cries [sic] to God in heaven.¹

Instead of forgetting the wayward descendents of Menno Simons as they had forgotten Him, God in his mercy revived a remnant to reaffirm and propagate the truths for which so many had lived and died in the sixteenth century radical reform movement. The efforts of Satan to suppress these truths were thwarted again.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary holds that there are certain beliefs inherited from the New Testament which have come to it through the forebears of its denomination that are the *sine qua non*² of their Church. An understanding of those truths and an appreciation for them along with their Biblical bases are taught in the Seminary. These Christian concepts which have waxed and waned throughout the history of Christendom, but which have reached this date, have to do with the following themes:

1. The Bible
2. The Church
3. The Ordinances
4. Discipleship and Mission
5. The Authority of Christ and the Authority of Civil Powers.

These concepts are somewhat distinct from those of many other denominations and are indispensable to the existence of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

UNIQUE VIEW OF THE BIBLE

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the Bible is the source from which all spiritual truth most clearly comes. The living, dynamic Word of God which penetrates the spirit and soul of man is transmitted best through the Bible. The Bible is the final test of truth and the highest authority regarding that which a person should believe about God, the spiritual world and the moral conduct that God requires of man. Although most evangelical denominations teach the authority of Scripture, the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the Word of God must also be living, experienced, and dynamic in the individual in order for it to provide effective and continuing salvation. The Seminary teaches that doctrinal truths must be practically experienced. This view of the Bible which the Mennonite Brethren have espoused through their history is unique.

This position teaches that the Bible is not just one book. It consists of sixty-six books which were written by many authors in ancient languages. The authors have accurately recorded the self-revelation of God in human history. These historical records are written in phenomenal forms. The events are described as the authors experienced them.

Although each book is written for specific purposes, the central theme of the entire Bible is the grace of God and his plan for humanity. This is revealed and described as a repeated intervention by God in human history whose purpose is to redeem a people who will voluntarily submit to the

loving authority of Christ. This theme is best expressed by the Apostle Paul: "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth" (Eph. 1:9-10).

This same theme is expressed by the Apostle Peter who applies Old Testament writings to Christians: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (I Pet. 2:9-10). For the Mennonite Brethren, the Bible is not principally a theological textbook. It is a divinely inspired compendium of testimonies which above all else speaks of God, of interpersonal relations and of God's mission of grace to humanity.

The Bible is divinely inspired and hence only through it is a living, saving faith clearly revealed to man. It is for this reason that the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that it should not be considered as a book of systematic theology, apologetics, secular history, science, philosophy nor psychology.³ This is not to say that it does not contain many truths which these disciplines also teach; but its central theme is revelational, relational and missionary.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary emphasizes also that the truths of the Bible must be lived and experienced. The comprehension of the divine truth which one reads in the Bible comes as a result of obedience. Thus, the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary attempts to teach that behavior which coincides with the moral, ethical, and relational teachings of the prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostles leads one into experiential truth of God (John 7:17). The Seminary recognizes that academic discipline and exacting investigation are indispensable guarantees against theoretical errors and logical fallacies; but it also knows that an intellectual understanding of the

Bible does not guarantee experiential knowledge, morality or Christlike human relations.

There is a persistent temptation among theological seminaries to look for a system into which all the truths of the Bible may be neatly placed without logical contradiction, but the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in keeping with its tradition resists that temptation. Its heritage emphasizes that the Word of God which comes to man through the Bible is a living, active, practical Word which is evasive to rigid systems formulated by men. This is not to say that the Bible is not the Word of God. But it does mean that when the Bible truths are taught as only propositional truths without being quickened by the Spirit of God through the crucible of experience, they can become a letter which kills instead of the Spirit which gives life.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches appreciation for the heritage that "truth is not abstract and ideological [*sic*] but existential in nature. It is not resident in ideas but in living."⁴ From this heritage of the centrality of the moral and relational teachings of the Bible, the Biblical Seminary affirms that obedience leads one to knowledge, while knowledge may or may not lead one to obedience.⁵

In view of this concept of the Bible, the Biblical Seminary cannot easily be labelled theologically. It does not satisfy the Arminian nor Calvinistic camps. Its statement of doctrine does not even mention the millennium and thus it is not likely to be accepted in the pre-millennial camp, nor in the armillennial system, nor in the post-millennial grid. For the most part in recent years, it has resisted the dispensational system. Since it does not make science superior to the Bible, it can't be classified as liberal in the true meaning of that word. Although it teaches that the Word of God is living and powerful, it might be suspect of being Neo-orthodox. It holds to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith but is not considered Fundamentalist. Again, the reason for this seeming ambiguity is that it emphasizes that one must know *in whom* he believes through personal experience as well as *what* he believes.

The student of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical

Seminary is taught to appreciate this view of Scripture. Although it may be thought dangerous by some to "permit all sorts of truth to lie loose,"⁶ the Seminary teaching faculty maintains that this is exactly how God has revealed his truth in the Bible. Gerhard Hasel has expressed the position of Biblical theology in contrast to systematic theology in this way:

Biblical theology is not aiming to take the place of or be in competition with systematic theology as the latter expresses itself in the form of system building based on its own categories either with or without the aid of philosophy . . . systematic theology will always have its place in Christian thought. But in contrast to systematic theology, must not the discipline of Biblical theology draw its very principles of presentation from the Bible rather than ecclesiastical documents of scholastic and modern philosophy? Would it not be one of the tasks of Biblical theology to come to grips with the nature of the Biblical texts as aiming beyond themselves, as ontological and theological in their intention and function through the ages, without defining in advance the nature of Biblical reality?⁷

The formation of a Biblical Seminary instead of a theological seminary is a result of a conscious decision to avoid placing human thought systems in a superior place to the revelation of God which must be experienced as much as it is intellectualized.

UNIQUE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH

Ecclesiology refers to the doctrine of the church, the People of God. Roman Catholics define the church as follows:

When the church is spoken of, it means that visible religious society, founded by Jesus Christ, under one head, St. Peter, and continuing under the governance of his successors, the popes.⁸

Augustine (5th century) believed profoundly in the Universal Church as a visible institution distributed

throughout the world and continued from the church of the apostles through the bishops whom he considered to be the successors of the apostles. He did believe that the bishops including the bishop of Rome could err; but the Catholic Church for him was the tangible body of Christ apart from which there was no salvation.

In order to appreciate the concept of the church which the Anabaptists held, it is necessary for the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary student to understand that from the time of Constantine (4th century) when the Roman government made its peace with the church, the latter slowly but surely associated itself with the state. Before this time the Roman state had insisted on managing the religion of its citizens. The emperor was the *pontifex maximus*, the high priest of the official religions recognized by the state. Although the Christian church never had been as subordinate to the Roman state as had been the pagan religions, the emperors put into effect the decrees of the church councils against heretics and those who were condemned.¹⁰ By the sixteenth century the church and the state were identical for all practical purposes. By virtue of being baptized in the church, babies became citizens of the Holy Roman Empire. Those outside this realm were pagans and enemies of the Empire. To disobey the church was the same as disobeying the state; and to refuse baptism was tantamount to treason. The Inquisition of the Roman Catholic Church did not condemn people for immorality as much as it did for refusal to believe in certain doctrines. The church tried the victims and the punishment was meted out by the state.

Some changes came with the Reformation. The Mainline Reformers viewed the church as a continuation of the Old Testament people of God, Israel. Paedobaptism (infant baptism) was believed by them to be a continuation of the rite of circumcision. In the same way that circumcision made a person a citizen of the nation of Israel and a member of the people of God, so baptism was believed to make the person a citizen of the Christian nation into which he was born as well as a member of the church.

Although Luther lived in the time of the sixteenth century, his works demonstrate his desire to form a true Christian church. His experiences and his study of Scripture led

him to reject the idea of an infallible and hierarchical church. Neither could he accept a specially endowed priesthood which dispenses salvation through the sacraments. He restored the concept of the priesthood of all believers.

He was a believer in paedobaptism, however, and was hard put to explain why there were so many church members who did not live in a manner that coincided with true Christian morality. Why didn't saving faith, which was received at baptism and which supposedly removed original sin, produce transformed lives? He could not deny that those who were baptized were members of the church because baptism was the initiatory rite for church membership. A careful study of his writings, however, reveals an interesting evolution of his thought regarding the nature of the church. In the preface to his work of 1526 entitled, "The German Mass and Order of Service," he attempts to provide a uniform order of service for all within the church. In this work he divides the church into three categories of people.

The first class of people in the church are those who are baptized in infancy, but who are not yet Christians. They are becoming Christians and need to be strengthened by the Word and sacrament. The Christian, says Luther, does not need baptism, the Word nor sacrament since all things are his. It is the sinner who needs these.¹¹

A second kind of divine service or mass is for the unlearned lay folk. This group consists also of many who are not yet sufficiently oriented to believe or to become Christians. They are interested in the Gospel and may be sympathetic toward it, but are not yet Christians.¹² Since these two groups are baptized, however, they are included in the church as members.

The third kind of service, writes Luther, should be truly evangelical and only for a select number. The group to which this order of service should be provided is so similar to the Anabaptist congregation that it seems best to quote the exact words of the great reformer.

The third kind of service should be a truly evangelical order and should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people. But those who want to be Christians in

earnest and who profess the Gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reprov'd, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ, Matthew 18:15-17. Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul's example, II Corinthians 9:13.¹³

Throughout Luther's life the concept of the church as a community of believers is repeatedly mentioned by him. This seems to have been his ideal.

An understanding of the logical implications of this is important. It has to do with an understanding of the divine plan in history. If God's purpose in history is primarily to transform the societies of the world into Christian societies by the gradual influence of the Gospel, it would be wise and good to depend for help on baptized political leaders who profess to be Christians. If, on the other hand, the principal plan of God in history is to form a new society to which only converted people belong and to which they pledge their first loyalty, there is really no room for dependence upon an existing society which is fallen and which is predominantly controlled by non-Christians. The first concept would permit the use of different methods and weapons in order to realize its ideals. The formation of a completely new society of persons whose first loyalty is to Christ would admit only mature people and would permit only the methods and weapons of Christ to realize its ideals. This new society or church would consist only of truly converted believers. The mission of the church would not be that of changing a society by gradual influence, but rather that of creating a new one of converted and regenerated people who would voluntarily become members of it and who would participate in the privileges and responsibilities pertaining to it.

Beginning with 1526 Luther began to revert to the medieval concept of the church again. He began to rely less on the power of the Word to bring about reforms, and began to place his reliance more and more on the support of the

civil authorities—who were, of course, members of the church who had been baptized as infants without a conscious conversion. In 1530 he goes so far as to approve the death penalty for those who would not accept his doctrine.¹⁴ Along with Melancthon he asked for capital punishment for the leaders of the Anabaptists, and after the peasants' revolt he wrote: "Aim, [*sic*] flog, massacre however you can. Should you die while so doing, be sure that you could never find a more blessed death."¹⁵ Like the pattern of the Inquisition Luther seemed to apply discipline only to cases of heresy without thought of immorality.

Calvin and some of the other mainline Reformers could not accept the Lutheran idea of the church and explained it in a different way. They felt it was impossible to know who the real church was but stated that:

The Catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.¹⁶

To put it more simply, the invisible church is the church as God sees it, a church which contains only believers, but the visible church is the church as man sees it, consisting of those who profess Jesus Christ with their children and therefore decree to be the community of the saints.¹⁷ According to the main-line Reformers the church may and always does contain some who are not yet regenerated.

The Anabaptists rejected the idea of an invisible church. They believed that the church must be visibly evident by its life and works. An invisible secret church was for them a contradiction in terms. The invisible company of the elect is identical to the visible company of the baptized who persistently obey Christ. This belief is a part of the heritage taught at the Biblical Seminary.

Anabaptists also refused to believe that there was salvation on the basis of nationality. Ethnicity was definitely not an issue. That which produced their unrelenting missionary drive was their belief that the people of God is supra-national and non-ethnic. They knew it to be their duty to cross ethnic and national boundaries to bring people into

the formation of one new man out of all nationalities and thus establish peace (Ephesians 2:15). Like the Apostles before them they believed that a person did not become a part of the people of God because he was a Jew, a German, a Dutchman or a citizen of the Holy Roman Empire, but only by a faith relationship to Christ.

The church to the Anabaptists was not just a place where the sacraments were rightly administered and the Word was preached. Neither was it merely a congregation of Christians and their children. It was a group of people who had voluntarily bound themselves to Christ and to one another in a relational and missionary covenant. In order to become a member of the church, one must not only have repented of his sins and turned to Christ in faith and obedience, but he also must have responsibly committed himself to the covenant and the mission of the church in a conspicuous and active way. The church members of the Anabaptist movement were distinct from the unbeliever. The true Christian was strikingly conspicuous by his life in public and in private.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the church is supra-national and non-ethnic in character. It believes that entrance into the Mennonite Brethren Church must be by true repentance of sins, a responsible conversion to Christ, a submission to Christ through His people.

UNIQUE VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS

Again an understanding of our spiritual heritage is best gained by contrast with the prevailing views regarding the sacraments in other branches of the church. The concept of the sacraments as expressed by the Council of Trent is still the official position of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸ (It must be remembered that although encyclicals of the pope have been written, no dogma nor doctrine has been changed with Vatican II. The purpose of Vatican II was to dialogue with non-Catholics in order to bring them back into the Roman Catholic Church. In order to introduce or change doctrine or dogma the pope must speak *ex cathedra*, in other words, with infallibility).¹⁹ For a Catholic a sacrament is "a

physical or material element clearly presented to the senses which, by its similarity, represents by the institution which it signifies and by the consecration which it contains, an invisible spiritual grace."²⁰

Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic theologian (d. 1274) whose theological system is recognized and imposed by church law, states that the sacraments are the means by which the grace of God works. They infuse grace into the person *ex opere operato*, that is, by virtue of their being performed. Their efficacy does not depend on the faith or knowledge of the participant nor the attitude or virtue of the administrator. From the Middle Ages to the present there remain seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church which are sometimes described by Catholic theologians as pipelines of grace. They are: baptism, Holy Eucharist, penance, matrimony, anointing of the sick, confirmation, and holy orders. (Catholic Ency. p. 534)²¹

Reformed theologians define the sacrament in this way:

A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ, and the benefits of the covenant of grace, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and these, in turn, give expression to their faith and allegiance to God.²²

For the Reformed believers the sacraments include the covenant of grace, the righteousness of faith, the forgiveness of sin, faith and conversion, communion with Christ in his death and resurrection, etc. In other words, the sacraments for the Reformers signified Christ and his spiritual riches. For them, when the sacrament is received by faith, the grace of God accompanies it, and the believer is strengthened.

Luther taught that there were only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. He maintained that the baptismal water had become a gracious water of life through the Word and thus affected regeneration and the removal of original sin. The other Mainline Reformers and the Anabaptists could not accept this. All of the Reformers rejected the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation which declares that the elements in the mass are converted into

the real body and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration by the priest. Luther substituted the idea of consubstantiation which states that Christ's bodily presence is in, with, and under the elements.

The non-Lutheran Reformers held a slightly different view. Zwingli denied absolutely the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper and made it principally an act of commemoration; although he did not deny that in it Christ is spiritually present to the faith of the believer. Calvin maintained an intermediate position insisting on the *real*, though spiritual presence of the Lord in the Supper. For both Calvin and Luther the Lord's Supper was a divinely appointed means for the strengthening of faith.

It may be said that both the Lord's Supper and baptism were understood by the Reformers as a means to strengthen faith. This posed a problem for them regarding baptism, however. How could baptism strengthen the faith of infants since they could not exercise it? Some Reformers simply stated that infants born of believing parents are children of the covenant, and as such are heirs of the divine promises, including the promise of regeneration. To these the spiritual efficacy of baptism is not limited to the time of its administration but continues through life. Others maintained that the children of the covenant were to be regarded as presumptively regenerated. This means that they are not regenerated by baptism but are assumed to be regenerated until the contrary appears in their lives.²³

The Anabaptists could not find these teachings supported by Scripture. They saw too much of the influence of the Romanism in these views. Regarding baptism they did not see this ordinance as a sacrament through which grace was received. They saw it as an ordinance which must be obeyed. In keeping with their view of the church they saw this as a commitment to Christ and to his church as a covenanting community with a mission to the world. They, of course, rejected the idea of non-believers' baptism in infancy. Baptism was to them a commitment to the responsibility of a new life in the framework of a new covenant of relationship with the brethren. The Lord's Supper was a renewal of that covenant made in baptism. To become bap-

tized meant that "they went freely under the cross and for the Gospel's sake were made pilgrims and martyrs throughout the know world."²⁴ The Communion Supper was a reaffirmation of that commitment.

When one became baptized he became a Christian incorporated into a fellowship of Christians with certain responsibilities and privileges. He was to receive from the community a caring concern, the intercession of the brotherhood, the mutual sharing and receiving of material goods in the time of need, and the gentle admonition and Christ-like redemptive correction when necessary. Menno wrote:

If you see your brother sin, then do not pass him by as one that does not value his soul, but if his fall be curable, from the moment endeavor to raise him up by gentle admonition and brotherly instruction before you eat, drink, sleep, or do anything else as one who ardently desires his salvation, lest your poor erring brother harden and be ruined in his fall.²⁵

It has been recorded that: "In court one of the Anabaptists said that Christ was present in the community of the faithful, and not in the bread and wine."²⁶ The ordinances were only reminders of certain commitments of relationships made within the community as the true church of Christ. The Lord's Supper was an institution of the cup of the New Covenant which is suffering.²⁷ They believed that if one were to follow Christ seriously and live as He commanded there would be suffering. They did not shun that cross, and went freely to the countries of Europe to bring people of all nations into the Kingdom of God.

After having carefully studied history, the Mennonite Brethren Biblical seminary teaches that there are two principal sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. It teaches that only responsible converted people should be permitted to participate in these. The Seminary also teaches that baptism is by immersion in the likeness of Christ's death and resurrection. It is a symbolic act of death to an old life of independence and sin to a new life of union with and dependence upon Christ and His church. It is a relational commitment to Christ, his church, and their mission.

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches also that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic way of reaffirming one's faith in the new covenant made by Christ with his followers and realized by the maintenance of reconciliation among the brethren and a continual participation in the mission of the Church. It teaches that repentance, conversion, and reconciliation are prerequisites to these ordinances.

UNIQUE VIEW OF DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that the supreme and first task of the Church is world evangelism (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; II Cor. 5:18-20 et. al.).

It teaches that all Christians are responsible for the diffusion of the Gospel and for the forming of a church with people from all nations. It teaches that the missionary mandate is binding for all Christians of all times.²⁸

It also teaches that suffering is inseparable from the mission of the church. It does not look upon suffering as a form of masochism or indulgence that must be endured in order to bring merit and approval before God. It holds that if one is to live a godly life in this world he will have to suffer (II Tim. 3:12); and that the Christian is actually called to suffering (I Pet. 2:20-22). The contemporary teaching that the purpose of conversion is to provide the believer with peace now and heaven later is consciously refuted. It is taught that suffering without retaliation is that which attracts men to Christ. The professors of MBBS affirm that "he that does not do the works of Christ is a sham-Christian and no member of Christ's Church!"²⁹

The call to become a Christian for the Biblical Seminary is a call to the cross. That cross to which the Christian is called "must be, like his Lord's the price of non-conformity."³⁰ Students are taught that a person who wishes to follow Christ will clash with the world and will suffer and may die for his stance. Suffering for Christ is taught to be a deterrent to sin and careless living, and that he who suffers for his faith has ceased from sinning (I Pet. 4:1). For the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary the kingdoms of

this world and the Kingdom of Christ are diametrically opposed. There is bound to be conflict. If there is no conflict either the Kingdom of Christ is becoming identified with the kingdom of the world, or the kingdoms of the world are becoming more Christianized, or both is happening.

John Bright has expressed the transfigured suffering of the Christian like this:

God is called forth for himself a true people, the people of the Servant. He is calling you to be that people, and to serve his purpose. You are to be the vessels of his redemption, to bring Israel back to itself and to proclaim his salvation in the entire world. To be sure, you will find in this destiny no exemption from suffering, but precisely a summons to it. Yet suffering will be transfigured; no longer will it be to you brute agony without meaning, but the very instrument of redemption.³¹

This aspect of mission and discipleship is taught at the Biblical Seminary. It may be asked, however, that if this is what is taught, why is such a sense of mission and the discipleship of suffering so rare in the western world? There is an explanation for this which bears upon this subject.

In the early church there was from the very beginning a temptation to maintain the ease and protection which comes from the approval of the world. After Pentecost and prior to the martyrdom of Stephen, the Church grew and was notably popular with the people (Acts 2:47). It is important to note, however, that missionary activity was confined to Jerusalem and the nearby areas with the exception of those who had attended Pentecost and had returned carrying the message with them. There were the usual internal problems of ethnic differences (Acts 6:1), and the temptation to materialism (Acts 5). With the Spirit filled honesty of Stephen, however, and with his demand for repentance, intense persecution began and with it suffering (Acts 9:1-2). With this persecution came a great expansion of the church to other peoples. Church growth and mission seemed to be directly related to suffering and persecution.

Throughout the early days of the church there was much persecution and suffering and yet the church grew

faster and more effectively in those years than since. When Constantine made peace with the church, it changed from a persecuted church to a persecuting one. It became embroiled in internal discussions, quarrels, and mutual excommunications. Although there was missionary work done during this period, it was done by force and principally to gain proselytes from opposing factors. As is well known, the church plunged into an almost irreparable degeneracy.

With the coming of the sixteenth century and the Anabaptist zeal to form a believers' church of people disposed to live as Christ lived and taught, also came intense persecution. Suffering for Christ became an instrument of ministry and mission; and although the Anabaptist and Mennonite church was nearly obliterated as a result of persecution, its mission was clear and evangelism and missionary activity have left their permanent mark on the Christian world.

The intense persecution not only dispersed the Anabaptists, it also drove them together into protective covenanting churches. Since many came from common areas, they were naturally bound together by common interests and beliefs. They moved in groups across Europe and finally to Russia, Canada and the United States. In their zeal to preserve the church as they conceived it to be, they gradually became quite ethnic and quite concerned about self-preservation instead of mission. They had moved from the dangerous work of mission to the comfortable task of preserving their traditions.

The early Anabaptists were distinctive in their faith and life, but culturally one with general population. The later Mennonites became distinctive in their cultural enclaves, linked together by extended family ties, but spiritually they were no longer much different from the rest of the populace . . . the once decisively dynamic witness had been replaced by a quietistic kind of testimony of the *Stillen im Lande*—the quiet in the land. The one dominant but unpopular concept of the Believer's Church had given way to a more popular and tolerated concept of the parish church. The once spiritual brotherhood of disciples had become a cultural denomination of citizens.³²

It was from this emphasis on introversion and obsession with self-preservation that the Mennonite Brethren broke in 1860. It broke from the lethargy and moral degeneration around them and also readopted the statement of mission as it was written in the 1660 statement of faith. This is highly significant in light of the fact that other than the Mennonite confessions, few church creeds contain a statement on mission.

The Mennonite Brethren have been outstanding in their zeal for overseas missions, but have had little significant numerical growth through home-missions in the United States and Canada. Until the Second World War ethnicity was guarded to a rather large degree, and little outreach was made to expand in the English speaking areas of the Western Hemisphere. Some groups have accused the Mennonite Brethren of having a "salt water complex of mission." By this is meant that although mission work has produced more Mennonite Brethren churches in other nations, it tends to guard its European ethnic purity in the United States and Canada.

The Seminary does not depreciate the ethnic heritage of the members of the Mennonite Brethren church, but it does teach that membership is a commitment to the mission of recruiting converts from all races and incorporating believers from all ethnic groups into the fellowship of Christ as equals. The spiritual heritage which has been passed down to the Mennonite Brethren today involves a clear understanding of discipleship and mission. It is a continuing call to avoid ethnic exclusivism and to bring into Christ's Church all who repent, believe, and give themselves to the mission and discipleship of a covenanting fellowship.

Distinctive to the Mennonite Brethren heritage of discipleship and mission is the centrality of reconciliation and Christian arbitration in the settling of controversies. Negatively this precludes violence of any kind in the life of the Christian. Christ taught this categorically (Matt. 5:39-42, 44; 26:51-56; John 18:33-40.) Paul and Peter repeat the teaching (Rom. 12:19-21; I Pet. 2:21-24). It is patently clear that Jesus forbids the use of violence among his followers and requires of them to substitute constructive

peaceful action. The non-violent position for the Mennonite Brethren is clearly stated in the Statement of Faith and is a *sine qua non* of the Denomination.³³

Mission not only means non-violence. It means active participation in peacemaking. The attitudes and actions toward those who exploit the non-Christian have been explained, but how Christians are to live among themselves needs to be mentioned. The resume of this is stated by Christ who is our Lord and to whom we voluntarily submit in obedience as disciples. His instructions are clear in Matthew 18:15-17. This passage gives specific instruction as to how Christians are to settle their differences. Paul makes it clear that Christians are to settle their differences among themselves and are not to resort to pagan civil courts (I Cor. 6:1-4).

The concept of discipleship which has been inherited from the forebears of our denomination and which is taught at the Biblical Seminary is that of redemptive, caring concern for the brotherhood and aggressive and active peaceful settling of disputes in the world where that is possible.

THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST AND THE AUTHORITY OF CIVIL POWERS

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that Christ is King with a kingdom. His true subjects are those who have been born again spiritually and have voluntarily acknowledged His sovereignty and have submitted to His authority over and above all other allegiances.

The kingdom is in the past in that God has planned it from eternity and initiated His invitation to become a citizen in it since the fall of man. It is present in the sense that it always exists whether it is acknowledged or not, and that while the present order of human history exists, His gracious invitation is still offered to men outside it. It is future in that it is eternal and will someday abolish all other rule, authority and power; and will be delivered up to God by Christ as finally consummated (I Cor. 15:24).

True Christians as citizens of the Kingdom of Christ, then, are bound to acknowledge civil governments as having been temporarily arranged in their present positions to

maintain order in society (Acts 17:24-31). Since these governments are inferior and subject to the sovereignty of Christ, they are responsible to Him. Christians are obligated to respect them, pay the taxes that they require for existence, and obey their statutes in so far as these concur with Christ's teachings. When those teachings are not congruent with Christ's the true Christian is bound to obey God rather than men.

Most denominations of the Protestant tradition teach that the Christians should disobey the mandates of civil governments when they do not agree with God's laws *except in the orders to kill and make war*. The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary teaches that an order from a civil government to participate militarily against a person or nation is contrary to Christ's order not to resist evil by force.

The Mennonite heritage teaches that the spiritual princes which influence the nations are fallen beings and oppose the sovereignty of God (Dan. 10:12-13). The Christian, however, is called upon to do what his government requires of him when that is congruent with Christ's teachings. He is to refuse to do what the civil authorities demand when those demands do not agree with Christ. The Christian, however, remains under the sovereignty of the government and is subordinate to it when he accepts the penalties it imposes even unto death. Positively speaking, the Christian is to respect, honor, and work constructively to improve his government and to remind it that it is subject to the sovereignty of God.

EPILOGUE

The spiritual heritage that is taught and appreciated at the Biblical Seminary is the transforming of evil into good. It is expressed in becoming involved in deeds of justice and in the preaching of the Good News of liberty. Our heritage is a call to do good, to save lives, to alleviate suffering, to promote the well-being of others as Christ has commanded us to do.

This kind of action by individuals and groups clashes

with the world. It is this clash with the world which comes from living as Christ would have us live that is the cross for the Christian. The obeying of Christ in contradistinction to the obeying of the government to kill is bound to be misunderstood as close to treason especially in the time of war. Yet, it is to this that the Christian is called. This is our heritage which we proudly claim. Constructive, peaceful, aggressive action for righteousness is a cherished heritage at the Biblical Seminary.

Obviously there is always a great gulf between the real and the ideal. Theory and practice are often poles apart. We live in a real world and we strive joyfully to close the distances more and more between what we are and what Christ would have us be. As we continue to behold the glory of our Lord in His life-style and seek to emulate it we discover that we are constantly being transfigured into His very own image from one degree of glory to another. Continuous serious and careful study of Scripture and history is the norm for the Seminary in order that the heritage of divine truth might not be lost and that our tradition might be established on truth.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Churches*, (Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Fresno, California 1975), p. 34.
- 2 *Sine qua non*, something indispensable.
- 3 John Christian Wenger, *Introduction to Theology*, (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1954), pp. 24-25.
- 4 Walter Klassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Conrad Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 1973), p. 21.
- 5 Leslie E. Mark, "Cheap Grace?", (Christian Leader, June 10, 1975), p. 2-3.
- 6 Roger Nicole, "Westminster Bulletin", (Spring, 1979).
- 7 Gerhard F. Hazel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972), pp. 14-15.
- 8 Robert C. Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville, Tennessee, 1975), p. 115.
- 9 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Historia del Cristianismo*, (Tomo I, Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, Apartado 4255, El Paso, Texas 79914), p. 225.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.
- 11 *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1974), p. 62.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
- 14 Alfred Kuen, *I Will Build My Church*, (Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois 1971), p. 210.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- 16 L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1949, p. 564.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 564.
- 18 The Catholic Encyclopedia defines the sacraments in these words: "These are: (a) a sensible sign instituted by God, which gives sanctifying grace; (b) both matter and form present with each sacrament; the matter is the

material used the forms, the accompanying words and actions; and (c) a minister, some one authorized to give the Sacrament with the intention of doing what the Church intends. It is good to know that the Sacraments produce grace . . . sanctifying grace is given by reason of the rite itself (*ex opere operato*) p. 534.

- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 203.
- 20 Latourette, *op. cit.*, p. 597 (translation mine).
- 21 Robert C. Broderick, *op. cit.*, p. 534.
- 22 L. Berkhof, *op. cit.*, p. 617.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 627.
- 24 Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, (Star King Press, Beacon Hill, Boston, Mass., 1958), p. 112.
- 25 *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, (Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 1956), pp. 411-412.
- 26 Franklin Hamlin Littell, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 29 John Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
- 30 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972), p. 97.
- 31 John Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
- 32 Hans Kasdorf, *The Church Concept of the Mennonite Brethren in Anabaptist Perspective*, (Master of Arts Thesis for the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California, 1972), pp. 34-35.
- 33 Article XV
- 34 John Howard Yoder, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

CHAPTER XII

PREPARING TEACHERS AT THE SEMINARY

David Ewert

Whereas the apostle James warned, "Let not many of you become teachers" (James 3:1), the teacher is God's gift to the church (Eph. 4:11). Indeed the teachers are listed with the apostles and prophets as those who laid the foundation of the Christian Church (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20). That the gift of apostleship and prophecy overlapped with that of teaching can be seen, for example, in Paul's claim that he was a preacher and apostle, "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (I Tim. 2:7). Moreover, it was from among the prophets and teachers in the local congregation of Antioch that Paul and Barnabas were selected as missionaries (Acts 13:1).

We should, therefore, not make too sharp a distinction between *kerygma* (proclamation) and *didache* (teaching). Luke reports that when Paul was in Rome he *preached* the kingdom of God and *taught* about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). If a sermon is to edify it must have some teaching content. On the other hand, the teacher of Biblical subjects should not neglect the hortatory element in his lectures.

Interestingly, in our Mennonite tradition the preaching ministry used to be called *der Lehrdienst* (the teaching ministry). If then the Seminary seeks to prepare teachers for the church (as the title of this chapter suggests), this must be understood to include the pastoral ministry, teaching in church schools, as well as evangelistic ministries at home and abroad. In the long list of spiritual and moral qualifications for church leadership given in I Timothy 3, only one skill or ability is mentioned, namely the ability to teach (I

Tim. 3:2). (From I Timothy 5:17, however, it could be gathered that there were also non-teaching elders.) Obviously the high calling to care for the church of God demands more of a church leader than the ability to teach (I Tim. 3:4,5), but teaching is given a central place.

The teachers of the Early Church were generally called from the ranks of the local congregation. Schools for the training of church leaders who could instruct the congregations in the Christian faith had not yet been raised up. This has led some sincere believers to raise the question as to whether a denomination that seeks to be a New Testament church should have a seminary at all. Are we not buying into a professional ministry by encouraging pastors, teachers and missionaries to seek seminary training? Has not the seminary model of Christian education been taken over by the church from the university? If so, is it a model that fits into the life of the church at all?

While these are legitimate questions it should not be overlooked that the Sunday school also was not known in New Testament times. In fact the Sunday school is historically of fairly recent innovation, and there are countries with repressive regimes in which Sunday schools are forbidden. When a Baptist delegation from the Soviet Union visited the United States several years ago, these representatives of a suffering church were asked how it was possible to function as a church without a Sunday school. Their answer was: the Early Church (also a suffering church) did not have Sunday schools either.

Why do I mention this parallel? To illustrate that the Church has always felt free to borrow educational models from its surrounding culture and to 'baptize' these into Christ. In fact the Early Church's worship was patterned largely after the Jewish synagogue service and, although a deep cleavage developed between church and synagogue, it never occurred even to Gentile churches that they should restructure their worship service in order to set themselves off as clearly as possible from the Jewish synagogue.

If then our Brotherhood, under the guidance of the Spirit, develops educational structures which it can afford and which serve its needs, it is not necessarily departing from New Testament ideals, even if such structures were

not known in the first century. Paul's words to Timothy: "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others" (II Tim. 2:2), express a permanent obligation of the church, regardless of what educational models it may adopt.

Our North American Mennonite Brethren have developed a number of institutions for the training of its youth—the Christian academy, the Bible institute, the Bible college and the liberal arts college. In 1975 the Mennonite Brethren of the United States and Canada joined hands in an effort to give the future teachers of our churches, schools and mission fields a seminary education. The Seminary views itself as an arm of the church, working together with it in fulfilling its mission here on earth.

The Seminary is, of course, only one of a number of agencies participating in the training of teachers for the church. It would be highly presumptuous for the Seminary to think that it could prepare ministers of the Word in the brief span of two or three years. Before students enroll at the Seminary many others have contributed to their development—the home, the church, the schools. The Seminary simply builds on the foundations laid by others.

We might begin, then, by asking: What kind of *prerequisites* does the Seminary look for in its students? From here we shall go on to describe the Seminary's *programs* of study. Next we shall focus on the *patterns* of theological education which the Seminary encourages. Finally, we must say a few words on the *purpose* of seminary training for the Mennonite Brethren Church.

I. PREREQUISITES FOR SEMINARY TRAINING

Those who are interested in the formal entrance requirements of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary are encouraged to peruse the current seminary catalogue. Since the Seminary is a graduate school it is expected that students have a bachelor's degree. However, mature students, without a college degree also are encouraged to enroll. Graduate students are asked to take the Graduate Record Examination as well as several other entrance tests.

In such matters the Seminary is no different from the university—just as the nomenclature of at least one of its degree programs (M.A.) stems from the university. In what respect, then, does the Seminary differ from a state school? What is it that makes it a service agency of the church?

First, in the *dedication* of its students. By dedication we do not mean that seminary students are necessarily more avid students than those of other institutions, but rather that they have dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ and seek to follow Him in daily life. And since the confession that one belongs to Christ is expressed in baptism, the Seminary accepts only such students who are members of a Christian community.

Because the Seminary holds to the unity of all believers, regardless of color, race, sex or religious affiliation, it welcomes students from other Christian traditions. The interaction of Mennonite Brethren students with those of other denominations has proved to be a very fruitful learning experience. Since, however, the Seminary was raised up specifically to serve the Mennonite Brethren Church, it is the Seminary's policy that at least fifty percent of the regular student body belong to the Mennonite Brethren Church. All full-time faculty, however, must be members of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Secondly, students who come to seminary (other than for personal enrichment) should have a deep sense of *vocation*. Without the conviction that God has called them to be his servants, students will find it hard to make the adjustments Seminary training requires and to face the rigors of three years of study. Like Jeremiah of old, students must feel the fire in their bones which will not allow them to quit when the going gets tough.

How the student arrives at this sense of calling varies considerably. Some can tell of a place where and a time when they heard God ask them, as he asked Isaiah long ago: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" With others it is a growing conviction over many years. In fact some students come to Seminary to have their call to spiritual ministry clarified. Others have already had this call strongly affirmed by their home church. Indeed, some students

who come for seminary training have been ordained to the ministry of the gospel.

Whether the seminary graduate becomes a pastor, a missionary, a teacher in a church school, or enters some other form of Christian service is not really the issue when a student enters seminary. What is important, however, is that the student have the deep conviction that God has laid his hand on him or her and is asking him or her to prepare for service in the great harvest field of the world.

Thirdly, students who have dedicated their lives to Christ, and have a sense of divine vocation, must also have the necessary qualifications to be teachers of the Word. Students who have tested their gifts in teaching or preaching experiences before they enroll at seminary can study with much greater assurance than those who come straight out of college or university without having had the opportunity to have their teaching gifts affirmed. Students who have taught in public schools for several years or who have taught Bible classes in their home congregations know better where their strengths and weaknesses lie than those who have never taught.

We believe that when God calls us to some form of service in his kingdom that he equips us for such a task. When then a person claims to have heard God's call to the teaching ministry, but lacks the necessary gifts to fulfill that calling, one must seriously ask whether God's call has been properly understood.

Everyone knows, of course, that people of modest ability, who yield their lives to God in humble obedience, can be used mightily by God. If, however, one is called to the ministry of the Word, the gift of teaching is absolutely essential. The seminary can give a student good tools to facilitate the communication of the Bible message, and practice will help to develop a person's abilities, but the seminary cannot give a student the 'gift' of teaching. Sometimes, of course, this gift is latent and needs to be fanned into flame, but every person who proclaims God's message should be able to say with Paul, "Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power" (Eph. 3:7).

We have isolated three prerequisites for seminary train-

ing, which set the Seminary off from the university and which define it as an arm of the church. But, we may ask, if we take seriously the priesthood of all believers, is it right to limit enrollment at the Seminary to people who meet these requirements? Hardly! For that reason the Seminary classes are open also to those who do not feel called to the teaching ministry, but who want to deepen and to enrich their lives through the courses of study offered at the Seminary.

Moreover, an increasing number of women are being attracted to the Seminary, not only for personal enrichment but because the Seminary offers them the kind of training they need for their professional life, both within and beyond the confines of the church. Some hope to be Bible teachers in Third World countries, others plan to teach the Word here at home. The Seminary is happy to enroll Christian women in its courses.

Having then singled out several prerequisites for seminary training, let us turn next to the programs of study offered at the Seminary which are designed to train people for the teaching ministry.

II. PROGRAMS OF STUDY AT THE SEMINARY

If the program of studies at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary should be entirely like that of any other evangelical seminary, the Seminary would not be true to its mission. If there should be nothing singular about a Mennonite Brethren seminary, one must ask seriously: "Why have one?" After all, there are plenty of other good evangelical seminaries in the country. On the other hand, it would be precarious for any seminary to be so unique that it becomes irrelevant. It may then in fact be a 'cemetery'—as some wags like to speak of seminaries in any case.

What should the curriculum of a Mennonite Brethren Biblical seminary look like? We do not intend to name courses but shall rather single out three emphases which may be understood as a kind of commentary on the seminary's official name.

First, the seminary's curriculum must be *Biblical* in em-

phasis. Our Anabaptist forebears were known as radical Bible readers. They called the churches of the 16th century to shake off tradition and return to their roots—the Bible. It is only appropriate, then, that our school should be called a Biblical seminary. Everyone knows, of course, that calling it Biblical will not make it so in reality, but the curriculum must reflect this concern.

A Biblical seminary with an Anabaptist orientation must open up the fountains of living water to its students by breaking through the language barrier which lies between the English and the Hebrew and the Greek Bible. For this reason the seminary asks all students in the Master of Divinity program and those majoring in Biblical Studies in the Master of Arts program to get a basic training in the Biblical languages.

Sometimes people who did not have the opportunity (or the willingness) to study the Biblical languages speak slightly of those who do. Students are told that learning Greek and Hebrew is a waste of time. When we have so many good English translations, why bother with Greek? How much Greek can one learn in two years? And so it goes.

What these critics fail to see is that two years of Greek gives a student a good grasp of the grammar and vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (and this holds true for the Hebrew as well). Moreover, it is not only what the student later makes of the Greek and Hebrew (many forget their conjugations), but what these languages do to their understanding of the mind of the Biblical writers. And not least in importance, is the ability of students who have some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew to read the best commentaries available (which are based on the Hebrew and Greek texts)—not to mention the rich resources found in Hebrew and Greek concordances, dictionaries and word studies. Also, it is quite impossible to evaluate English translations of the Bible for accuracy, without a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew.

The study of the Biblical languages is by itself a study of the culture of the Near East, and without some understanding of the Near East, serious errors are often made in the interpretation of the Bible. God's revelation took place

in history, and so a knowledge of the history, geography, religion, and everyday life of ancient Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, helps to put the Old Testament into proper context. And how could one possibly have a good grasp of the New Testament message without some knowledge of Palestine at the time of Christ, not to mention Hellenism and the Roman world? For this reason the Seminary requires all students to do some work in Old and New Testament backgrounds.

C.H. Dodd, famous Cambridge professor of New Testament, has expressed the importance of becoming conversant with the world of the Bible:

The ideal interpreter should be one who has entered into that strange first-century world, has felt its whole strangeness, has sojourned in it until he has lived himself into it, thinking and feeling as one of those to whom the Gospel first came, and who will then return into our world, and give to the truth he has discovered a body out of the stuff of his own thought.¹

Seminaries have at times been accused of teaching much about the Bible and too little actual exegesis of the Biblical books. We would be greatly remiss if we helped students to hone their tools for Bible study without ever studying the Scriptures themselves. The Seminary, therefore, offers a goodly number of Old Testament book studies every year, and most of the 27 books of the New Testament are offered as exegetical courses.

These exegetical courses give the student not only a rich supply of materials which can be worked into sermons, but they also introduce the student to the principles of hermeneutics. The principles of interpreting the Scriptures are learned best by practice. Moreover, quite apart from all other values, exegesis courses are a constant source of spiritual renewal and formation.

"It is pointless," said Spurgeon in his day, "to claim to be merely Biblical, when the whole question is what do the Scriptures actually teach on certain issues . . . No one can say that the Bible is his creed, unless he can express it in words of his own." In its courses in Old and New Testament Theology the seminary seeks to integrate the various

disciplines of Biblical study and come to grips with the basic strands of theology.

True Biblicism, however, resists the temptation to express the great doctrines of the Bible in categories alien to the Bible. True Biblicism seeks to set the Word free; to let it speak its own language and message. It refuses to force Scripture into logic-tight systems of thought. If, for example, Jesus and the apostles warn against apostasy, but also proclaim the security of the believer in Christ, so be it! One must then not force the alternative passages into an artificial harmony, but allow them to speak their own messages to us as we need them.

The Mennonite Brethren Church claims to be basically a non-creedal church and, because of its emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, it encourages all members of the church to study the Bible for themselves. This openness, however, can easily encourage an individualism that leads to doctrinal confusion. For this reason the Mennonite Brethren have a Confession of Faith, in which its understanding of the main biblical doctrines are set forth. This Confession, however, claims that the Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, and so this Confession, too, is subject to the Word of God. It is, however, only to be expected that all Seminary faculty members subscribe wholeheartedly to this Confession of Faith.

Secondly, the Seminary must also introduce its students to the history of the Christian church and its thought. There must be an emphasis on the *historical* in the curriculum. We do well to recall the words of Santayana: "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." The Seminary, therefore, offers an array of courses which, for want of a better term, may be described as 'historical theology', which embraces both the history of the Church and the history of its theology.

A knowledge of the history of the Church has several benefits. One, it can be of great encouragement to us in times of distress and darkness. To know that God sustained his people in the midst of deepest gloom and let the light of his revelation break through the clouds of despair, again and again, gives us hope and confidence that he will do so again. The Church, the Body of Christ, is somewhat like her

Lord; she may die on Good Friday, but rises again on Easter Sunday morning. That puts heart into God's servants who are laboring faithfully in the building of the Church.

Also, some knowledge of the Church's history lifts us out of our provincialism. Everyone who is loyal to his or her denomination faces the temptation of equating God's work with his or her particular tradition. Acquaintance with the wider Christian community helps to put the work, the problems, the successes and the goals of one's denomination in perspective.

To be informed on the history of Christian thought also serves as a guide and corrective for a person's theological reflections (and every sermon represents such reflections). Many an error in the Church could have been avoided if one had known from history that this error had been made before. I had a professor at Wheaton College who used to say: "If it's true it isn't new; and if it's new it isn't true." That's not in the Bible, but it's an observation worth pondering.

Of special significance in a Mennonite Brethren Biblical seminary is, as one might expect, the history of the Mennonites and their forerunners the Anabaptists. Just as every Presbyterian seminary would introduce its students to Calvin's theology, and every Methodist seminary acquaints its students with the life and teachings of John Wesley, so also must a Mennonite seminary show its students where the historical and theological roots of our Brotherhood lie. Sometimes, it seems, we are so desperate in our attempts to be relevant that one gets the impression that we have no past, at least not a worthwhile one. Seminaries at times fall into the temptations of being so pertinent to modern culture that they have little to say to that culture.

Quite contrary to the opinion of some, an interest in Anabaptist-Mennonite history does not represent an attempt by starry-eyed idealists to return to the 16th century. First of all, that is quite impossible, and secondly, not everything that happened in the 16th century is worthy of imitation. But there was also much that remains permanently valid. Above all, the Anabaptist movement represented a serious effort to return to the New Testament. A

knowledge of Anabaptist theology serves then like a grid through which we can see certain truths of the New Testament more clearly.

Much of what our forebears discovered in the Scriptures, and for which many of them died, is today a common heritage of evangelical Christianity. Denominational pride, therefore, is to be condemned, but an appreciation for our spiritual heritage is to be encouraged. It strikes one as singularly strange that some of our congregations so readily appoint pastors who know very little about our history or our theology.

What are some of the emphases in our Anabaptist heritage? There is the concept of the believers' church as a covenant community, including the discipline by the community of those who violate this covenant. There is the emphasis on discipleship as a way of life which flows out of conversion to Christ as Lord. Also, one is reminded of the great importance of missions and evangelism in the Anabaptist movement. Then there is the separation of church and state, including a strong witness to peace and non-resistance. Moreover, an appreciation of our heritage teaches us to identify with the poor, the oppressed, the refugees and the displaced persons.

Quite properly it may be contended that the Anabaptists are not our model; we take our cues from the New Testament. Precisely! But are not all of these great truths deeply anchored in the New Testament? A knowledge of the 16th century helps us to see these truths more clearly as Biblical teachings.

Will not our interest in our past make us sectarian? Should we not rather develop an appreciation for that which we have in common with other evangelical churches? Experience seems to demonstrate that those who have come to terms with their own church's tradition have the strength to transcend it and to appreciate other traditions without being threatened by them. Our distinctives become important to us only against the background of what we have in common with other denominations. And only as we learn to appreciate them can we share with others. If we recognize that all insights into God's ways come to us freely by his grace, and if we are deeply aware of our own sinfulness and

failure, we shall be kept from spiritual pride. There is a vast difference between loyalty to one's denomination and denominationalism.

When our Brotherhood accepted the Seminary as a General Conference school in 1975, it affirmed that the philosophy of education at the Seminary was to be not only 'Bible-centered' but also 'history-centered'.² There was, however, another emphasis which our Brotherhood wanted to see in our curriculum, namely that it should be 'church-centered'. And that leads us to a third focus in our Seminary's teaching program, namely the *practical*.

To be teachers of the Word in the local congregation calls for an understanding and appreciation of the church's Christian education program—whatever form it may take. Whether a pastor himself teaches a Bible-class on Sunday mornings or some weekday evening is not our concern at this point; we simply want to underscore the great need for good Bible teaching in the church and the pastor's role in Christian education. For this reason all students in the Seminary's Master of Divinity program receive some basic training in the field of Christian Education. Also, the Seminary offers a Master of Arts program with a Christian Education major for those who wish to specialize in this field.

Another area in which the Seminary enters into the life of the church is in its emphasis on mission and evangelism. Not only does it offer a Master's program in mission but it seeks to foster an interest in winning people to Christ in all of its students. It is hoped that all Seminary graduates, whether they enter the pastoral ministry or some mission program, will be active in evangelism and church planting. It was in the Radical Reformation that the missionary implications of the priesthood of all believers were worked out.³ The church is missionary or else it is not a church.⁴ To participate in Christ is to share in his mission. "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). There is no other kind of church, according to the New Testament, than the 'apostolic', the 'sent' church. The church is not engaged in mission as a wealthy man throwing crumbs to a beggar, but as a farmer who sows precious seed, fully aware that his very life depends on the harvest. Without mission the

church withers and dies. The Seminary, therefore, has no option in the matter of mission. Mission is not the hobby of a few believers, but the calling of all.

Whether a student goes into urban ministries, foreign mission, or pastoral work, he must be able to proclaim God's message. For that reason the Seminary puts a strong emphasis on preaching. A pastor may not always have the gift of administration or be a specialist in counseling, but if he can open up the Scriptures to the congregation so that its message comes alive he will have an effective ministry.

Preaching stands at the center of the worship in the church, for the sermon interprets for the people of God the meaning of God's great acts of redemption. It is through preaching that the church remains in touch with the apostolic age. Unfortunately the sermon is often a kind of postscript to the worship service.

R.T. Kendall, an American who now ministers in England, writes:

There is a widespread notion that preaching in the traditional sense is irrelevant for today's generation. I am sympathetic with this mood to some extent. I'd much prefer dialogue to most monologues I've heard. And who wouldn't prefer guitar-strumming, or holding hands in a circle . . . to what is most readily available today? The vogue approach to worship is at least an attractive alternative to the affected tone and mannerisms of so many clerics . . . Preaching became irrelevant because preachers did not know what to preach. Preaching is preaching only when it is the Bible that is expounded. But as a robust conviction in the Divine inspiration of Scriptures has diminished, so has preaching. A preacher is at home in the pulpit only when he is at home in God's Word.⁵

I am sure we all resonate with that observation. From my own experience I can testify that the awakening, renewal and the formation of my spiritual life in my teenage years can be attributed to the sermons I heard. Granted, the preachers in my youth (and we had a number of them, since our church practiced the multiple-ministry) did not have the

mass media to contend with in their demand for attention as we do today, but Spurgeon's counsel, that people will pay attention when you give them something to attend to, is still valid, I should think.

While there are many more subjects in a seminary curriculum than a student could possibly take in three years, it would be a great pity if a student did not avail himself of the courses on Preaching offered at the Seminary.

The course offerings at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary are designed to equip the student to think Biblically, to get a better grasp of the church's history and thought, and to develop his God-given gifts of communicating the Gospel.

From the prerequisites and the programs we turn now to some patterns of theological education which we believe to be significant in the training of others to become teachers of the Word.

III. PATTERNS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

I once heard a seminarian of another denomination make the observation that at the university he had found no 'heart' and when he came to seminary he found no 'head'. The contrast was obviously overdrawn, but his observation points to the conflict that seminarians often experience in their attempt to keep 'heart' and 'mind' in proper perspective. Phillips Brooks, the great 19th century preacher of Boston, was taken aback when at the beginning of his seminary training he noticed that some students who were very punctual at worship came to class with unprepared lessons. "The boiler had no connection with the engine," was Brooks' criticism. Although deeply devout himself, Brooks wrote to a friend: "When you are coming to see me? Leave your intellect behind; you don't need it here."⁶

It would be great gain if we could all come to a healthy holistic attitude toward the use of all our God-given powers in the service of God. In one of the statues of Augustine, which stands in an Augustinian chapel in Paris, the great African theologian holds in his hand an open book with a heart on it, to symbolize the synthesis of heart and mind—

so obvious in the life of this influential churchman and scholar.

If God calls people to prepare themselves to be teachers of the Word at seminary, then seminary studies themselves must be looked upon as a sacred vocation, a sacrifice which the student brings daily to God, an act of devotion. Students are sometimes discouraged from entering joyfully into their studies by warnings that study will quench the Spirit in their life. But why should studies be inimical to worship or fellowship when each of these activities is done in its place? A well-rounded theological education calls for a number of ingredients, which I would like to call patterns of theological education. We begin with the *classroom*.

Whatever the method of teaching that a professor may employ, the purpose of the classroom is to impart useful information on the various subjects in the curriculum. Faculty members are appointed presumably because they have some expertise in these subjects and can impart such information. Whereas it is hoped that students who graduate will continue their quest for such information as is needed to make them effective teachers of the Word, the seminary classroom can lay a good foundation for this quest. A pastor who regularly prayed for power before he preached was gently reproached by a faithful hearer of the Word, that it was not so much 'power' he needed as 'ideas'. An informative sermon or Bible lesson (other things being equal) always captures people's interest more readily than one that is entirely hortatory.

In our day the emphasis on experience has led some devout Bible students to believe that the mastery of a body of facts in Biblical studies is of little consequence. John Mackay warns:

"Just as ideas about God can become substitutes for the personal awareness of God's reality, so an emotion, expressive of some form of religious experience, but not necessarily involving meaningful contact with God, can become a substitute for a personal relationship with God and devotion to him. Religious emotions, like theological ideas, can become ends to themselves."⁷

Heart and mind clearly beong together.

Paul stresses the need not only of experiencing Christ at deeper levels (e.g. Phil. 3:10ff.), but also for a good grasp of the Biblical 'traditions', the 'deposit of faith'.

"In view of the relativism of so much contemporary thought it is worth emphasizing the crucial importance of truth. It has well been said that by and large men today are more interested in what helps than in what is true, in what they are doing by way of works of love than in what they believe. This is the atmosphere in which we must live out our lives, the very air we breathe. It tends to make our generation impatient of serious discussions of what is true. It is apt to dismiss such inquiries as hair-splitting and to return with relief to the more congenial task of enjoying life."⁸

The manner in which a professor communicates knowledge is often as important as the information itself. Of a famous professor of Greek it was said that when he wrote the word *doxa* (glory) on the board, the classroom seemed in fact to be full of the glory of God. When students sense that the professor is seeking to 'do the truth' just as they are; if he comes to the Scriptures with deep humility, standing, as it were, 'under' the Word of God, the classroom can at times become a veritable house of God.

The spirit in which the instruction is given is as important as the content of the lecture. The great British missionary statesman, Max Warren, tells of one of his teachers who took his spiritual fumbings seriously, never exploited his ignorance, and always treated him with respect. "He never tried to give easy answers to difficult questions, and so I began to learn that in the life of the Spirit there are no easy answers. I sometimes forgot this later on, but the basic lesson stuck. It was worth learning if one was ever to be a leader in helping others to discover truth."⁹

When it comes to the unshakeable verities of the Word of God a professor in an evangelical seminary is expected to be unyielding; dogmatic if you like. But there are so many areas of knowledge in which one must allow for options. Openness to new insights is a highly prized attitude. Of course, if one never shuts the doors on anything, one's mind can become rather draughty. Of the Athenians it was said

that they spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new (Acts 17:21). They were interested only in dating theological girls—to use the language of John Mackay—rather than marrying great ideas.¹⁰

Work in the *classroom*, however, needs to be supplemented with work in the *library*. Only part of a student's week is spent in lecture halls. Much of his time is spent in the library. To be a teacher of the Word one must learn where to find useful information if one's well is not to run dry in the ministry. The late Dr. A.H. Unruh used to say that a housewife may have all the tools to prepare a dinner but if the cupboard is bare these are of little use. Students must learn to re-stock their mental and spiritual cupboards by reading.

Samuel Johnson in his day wondered where people had got the idea that one could learn only in lecture halls. He thought that the reading of books (from which the lectures were probably taken) could do much more for a person. When Paul lay in prison he begged Timothy to bring him "the books and the parchments" (II Tim. 4:13).

The books in any good seminary library represent a broad stream of Christian (and non-Christian) thought. Here a student discovers the contributions of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and other thinkers to our understanding of the Christian faith. Often it is only against the background of other traditions that we learn to understand one's own, see its distinctiveness and discover its strengths and weaknesses.

Through his work in the library the student discovers for himself the most useful tools to carry on his studies after he leaves seminary. By demanding that students read in areas in which they may have no interest initially, professors often open up new veins from which gold can be mined. William Barclay's counsel to ministers holds also for seminary students: "If there is one bit of good advice in regard to study, it is to keep always on one's desk at least one great difficult book, a book which really stretches the ming."¹¹

It is said of the Scottish divine, John Baillie, that he combined the affectionate faith of a little child with the

poorly trained, but because he could not get along with people.

Naturally *koinonia* is not something that one learns in five easy lessons. It is something that one must exercise throughout life, and all that Seminary can do is to make students and faculty sensitive to this need and to encourage its exercise.

Having mentioned some prerequisites, described the program of studies, singled out some patterns in theological education, let me conclude with a few comments on the purpose of seminary studies. Assuming the Seminary accomplishes its stated purpose (to prepare teachers of the Word), how might this effect the church? We said earlier that the Seminary is not an end in itself; it is but a means to a higher purpose. What might this be?

IV. THE PURPOSE OF SEMINARY STUDIES

One of the purposes of training at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary is the *unification* of our churches in doctrine and practice. The strong influence of American individualism is a constant threat to the unity of our Brotherhood. In the past our ethnicity or closely-knit communities may have served as adhesives, but through urbanization and our mission efforts these bonds have become less significant, and so it is mandatory that we put a greater emphasis on unity in doctrine and practice. The Seminary sees itself as an agency helping our churches to maintain that unity.

This does not mean, however, that the Seminary is there simply to defend and endorse the *status quo* of the church. Our Brotherhood expects the Seminary to be on the cutting edge of the church's life. We might say, then, that another purpose of seminary education is *examination*.

Our churches live and work in the cross-currents of modern culture. They are constantly bombarded with novel ideas, complex problems, new challenges. This drives the church constantly back to the Scriptures, and the Seminary seeks to help students work through current issues, for this is what they will have to keep on doing wherever they minister in the future.

This means that even some traditional views and practices may have to be reexamined again and again to see whether we as a Brotherhood have understood correctly what God desires of us. E. Stanley Jones, who spent most of his life in India as a missionary, confessed later that he went to India with his theology neat and tied up with a blue ribbon, and felt that all he had to do was to defend what he believed. Then God showed him that it was wrong for him to be nervous about his theology, and that he must be free to explore new truth. After he had accepted Christ as his compass, as he put it, he felt free to investigate God's truth—free because he was anchored. So the Seminary must be anchored to the Rock, but geared to the times.¹⁵

Finally, the Seminary is there to bring seminarians and, through them, also the church to maturity in Christ. This purpose may be called *edification*. Perhaps we can do no better than to express this in the words of Paul to the Ephesians: "And his gifts were that some should be . . . teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood . . ." (4:11-13).

Who is sufficient for these things? We are not. But through the intercessory prayers and the support of our Brotherhood God may, in his grace, use the Seminary to train those whom he has called, so that they be "able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2).

NOTES

- 1 C.H. Dodd, "Theologian of Our Time," *Expository Times* 75 (1964), p. 102.
- 2 Yearbook of the 53rd Session of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (The Christian Press, 1975), pp. 21-26.
- 3 J. Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 120.
- 4 G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Westminster Press, 1962), p. 845.
- 5 R.T. Kendall, "Preaching in Worship," *Themelios* (April, 1979), p. 89.
- 6 A.V.G. Allen, *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks* (E.P. Dutton and Co., 1901), I, p. 175.
- 7 John Mackay, *Christian Reality and Appearance* (John Knox Press, 1969), p. 58f.
- 8 Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1976), p. 45f.
- 9 Max Warren, *Crowded Canvas* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p. 30.
- 10 John Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- 11 William Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 84.
- 12 David Wells, "Musings on God's Ways," *Christianity Today* (September, 1972), pp. 16-18.
- 13 Donald Coggan, *Convictions* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 257.
- 14 Robert Mounce, "The Marks of an Educated Person," *Christianity Today* (November, 1979), p. 24.
- 15 E. Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents* (Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 91.